Ontario

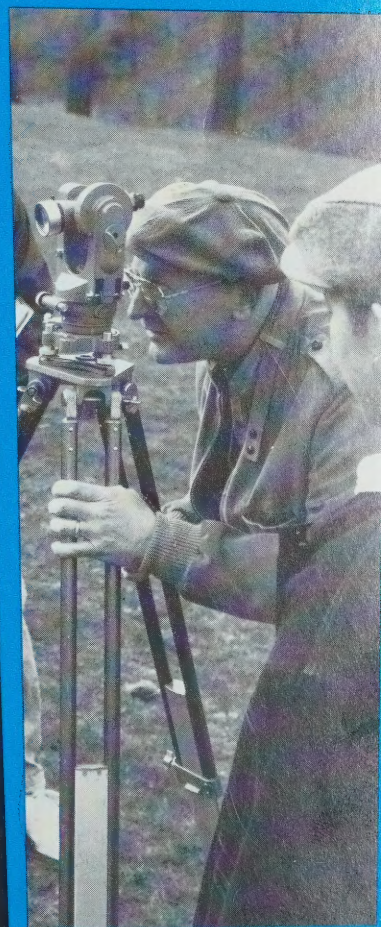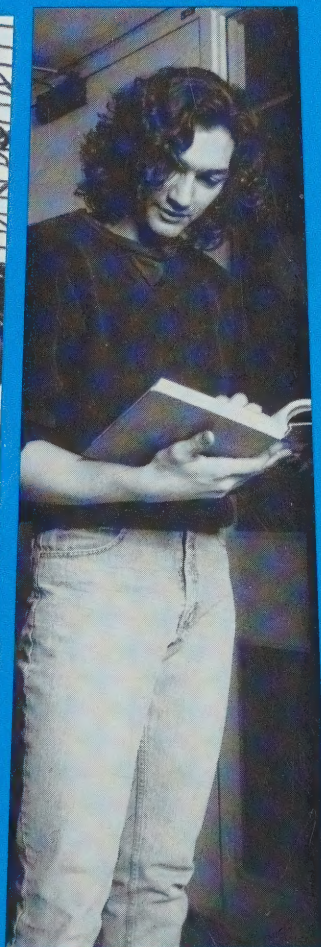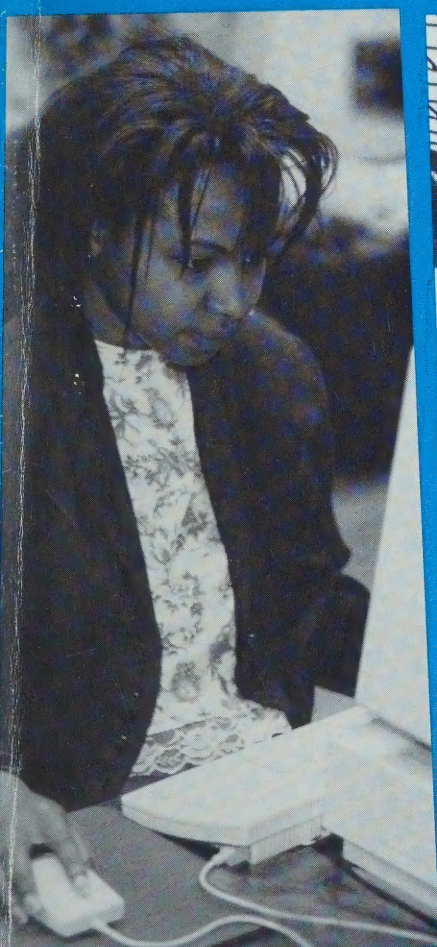# PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT:
A CREDIT TO THE COLLEGE SYSTEM

Report of the
Prior Learning Assessment
Advisory and Coordinating Group

February 1993 – June 1994

AX27494

⊘ Ontario

Ontario Council of Regents
for Colleges of
Applied Arts and Technology

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The Honourable John C. Snobelen
Minister of Education and Training
Mowat Block, 22nd Floor
900 Bay St
Toronto ON M7A 1L2

Dear Minister:

It is with a feeling of excitement about the potential prior learning assessment (PLA) has for Ontario's colleges of applied arts and technology that the Prior Learning Assessment Advisory and Coordinating Group submits to you its annual report for 1993/94.
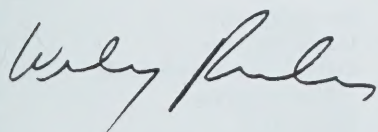
The previous academic year has seen a tremendous increase in the emphasis placed on PLA in the college system, and on ensuring that assessment and accreditation methods are fair and equitable. The various activities related to these outcomes are documented in this report.

In 1993/94, a solid foundation for PLA practitioner training was laid, and colleges began developing and testing their policies and practices related to PLA. However, significant issues remain to be resolved in the coming months to resume successful implementation of PLA within the college system.

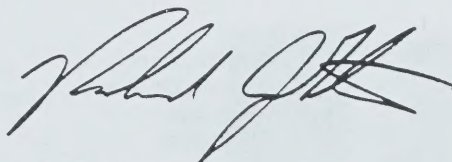The PLA Advisory and Coordinating Group believes that 1994/95 will see an increase in the numbers of adult learners seeking the benefits of prior learning assessment in Ontario's colleges.

Meanwhile, we wish to thank all those who have dedicated their time and expertise to the development of this initiative.

Sincerely,

Wesley Romulus
Chair
PLA Advisory and Coordinating Group

Richard Johnston
Chair
Ontario Council of Regents

Members of the PLA Advisory and Coordinating Group, 1993/94

Chair

Wesley Romulus
Member of Ontario Council of Regents
Director, Centre médico-social
    communautaire, Toronto
June 1993 – Present

Members

Doug Auld
College Management Representative
President, Loyalist College
June 1993 – November 1994

Marilyn Black-Lambert
College Management Representative
Director, Centre for Continuing
    Education
Conestoga College
June 1993 – Present

Trudy Bolduc
College Management Representative
Board of Governors
Cambrian College
June 1993 – November 1994

Martha Casson
College Management Representative
Committee of Registrars, Admissions,
    and Liaison Officers
Registrar, Humber College
December 1993 – Present

Afodonko Dodjro
Community Representative
International Trade Consultant
Zèvè Universal Trade, Inc.
March 1995 – Present

Rolande Faucher
Liaison Member
Présidente, Conseil de l'éducation
    et de la formation franco-ontariennes
April 1994 – Present

David Ferries
OPSEU Representative
CAAT Academic Division
Algonquin College
June 1993 – Present

Brenda Kearney
Liaison Member
Ontario Secondary Schools
    Representative
Principal
E.C. Drury High School
June 1993 – Present

Jane Kirkwood
Liaison Member
Senior Policy Analyst
Policy and Programs Branch,
Ministry of Education and Training
June 1993 – Present

Andrew Marks
Student Representative
President, Student Administrative
    Council
Northern College
October 1994 – April 1995

D'Arcy Martin
Labour Representative
National Representative of
    Communications, Energy and
    Paperworkers (CEP) Union
June 1993 – Present

Lynn McKee
Community Representative
Mentorship Coordinator
Skills for Change for
    Ontario Council of Agencies Serving
    Immigrants
November 1994 – June 1995

Danitsa Meunier
Business Representative
Human Resources and Training
    Consultant
Fédération des caisses populaires de
    l'Ontario
May 1994 – Present

Mary O'Donnell
Liaison Member
Aboriginal Education Council
Director, Native Education
Sault College
May 1994 - Present

Tom Ramautarsingh
Business Representative
Ontario Chamber of Commerce
Consultant, Georgetown
June 1993 – Present

Amy Thornton
OPSEU Representative
CAAT Academic Division
George Brown College
June 1993 – Present

Bobbi Wagner
OPSEU Representative
CAAT Academic Division
Sheridan College
June 1993 – Present

Marilyn Wang
Licensing and Regulatory Body
Representative
Director of Registration
College of Nurses of Ontario
June 1993 – Present

Alex Waugh
Liaison Member
Council of Ontario Universities
Vice Principal & Registrar of
    Woodsworth College,
University of Toronto
October 1994 – Present

Members for whom pictures were not available are listed on the following page.

Candise Barr
Community Representative
Community Development and
  Health-Care Advocate
June 1993 – Present

Ruth Baxter
Aboriginal Community
Representative
Education and Policy Analyst
Nishnawbe – Aski Nation for
  Aboriginal Education Council
January 1995 – Present

Katherine Fafard
Liaison Member
Ministry of Citizenship
Access to Professions and Trades
May 1994 – January 1995

Michel Ferland
OPSEU Representative
CAAT Support Division
La Cité collégiale
June 1993 – Present

Janice Gairey
Labour Representative
Education Director
Service Employee International
  Union (SEIU)
June 1993 – Present

Karen Lior
Community Representative
Advocates for Community-Based
  Training and Education for
  Women
June 1993 – Present

Howard Mirksy
Liaison Member
Senior Policy Advisor
Ontario Training and Adjustment
Board (OTAB), Policy Branch
January 1994 – April 1995

Brian Shentag
Student Representative
President of Finance
Student Representative Council
Sir Sandford Fleming College
October 1994 – April 1995

Tim Thompson
Liaison Member
Aboriginal Education Council
Ontario Association of Indian
  Friendship Centres
June 1993 - Present

Former Members

Madeline Beardy
Ontario Native Women's
  Association

Errington Charlton
Ministry of Citizenship

Hélène Dallaire
Advisory Committee on
  Francophone Affairs

Ari Dessanayake
Ministry of Citizenship

Alcide Gour
Superintendent, Niagara South
  Board of Education

Yvonne Molloy
Mohawk College Association of
  Continuing Education Students

Sébastien N'Singi
Conseil des écoles françaises de la
  communauté urbaine de Toronto

Denise Paquette-Frenette
Consultante en animation,
  formation et recherche

Bruce Robertson
OCCSPA

Jane Wilson
OCASI

Roman Woloszczuk
Registrar, Georgian College

PLA Secretariat Staff

Simoni Grant
Senior Policy Analyst

Barbara Lidston
Events Coordinator

Louis Lizotte
Coordinator

Hilroy Thomas
Senior Policy Analyst

Joy Van Kleef
Senior Policy Advisor

Contents

Background to the PLA Initiative

The Minister's announcement that a system of prior learning assessment (PLA)[1] would be implemented by the Ontario government (see Appendix 2) was the culmination of comprehensive research and consultation with regard to the contribution PLA could make to Ontario's postsecondary education and training programs.

The implementation of PLA throughout the college system was an important step in realizing the goals of a series of initiatives, as documented in the *Report of the Task Force on Access to Professions and Trades in Ontario* (Ministry of Citizenship, 1989) and *Vision 2000: Quality and Opportunity* (Ministry of Colleges and Universities, 1990). The former report recommended the establishment of the Prior Learning Assessment Network (PLAN), while the latter provided a comprehensive review of the mandate of the colleges. Both reports identified prior learning assessment as a much-needed service.

In April 1991, the Minister of Colleges and Universities, Richard Allen, asked the Ontario Council of Regents to create a committee to advise him on the development of a system of prior learning assessment for the colleges of applied arts and technology, in response to *Vision 2000*. The Ontario Council of Regents formed the Prior Learning Assessment Advisory Committee in September 1991. A secretariat was then created, which, jointly with the advisory committee, released a discussion paper in April 1992 for consultation with members of the college system and external stakeholders. The PLA Advisory Committee's final report, *Prior Learning Assessment: Enhancing the Access of Adult Learners to Ontario's Colleges*, was submitted in July 1992. The Minister released the report in October 1992, stating that he intended to proceed to Cabinet with proposals based on the report's recommendations.

In order not to lose the momentum gained through the consultation process, the Council of Regents established a PLA Pre-implementation Committee (see Appendix 3). This committee examined policy and training issues and prepared draft documents, anticipating the government's adoption of the report's recommendations.

On February 12, 1993, Premier Bob Rae announced that the government had approved the implementation of a system of prior learning assessment and the creation of the College Standards and Accreditation Council (CSAC). This marked the official beginning of PLA in Ontario. The Premier also announced that "funding for CSAC and PLA [would] come from a $3-million annual allocation set aside by the government in the 1991 Budget to fund initiatives put forward in the *Vision 2000* study on the college system."

In his "Open Letter to the College System", the Minister of Education and Training announced both initiatives, and, in a separate letter to the chair of the Council of Regents (see Appendix 2), the Minister directed the Council to "establish a Prior Learning Assessment Advisory and Coordinating Group to guide the implementation of prior learning assessment in the initial three-year phase". The group's mandate and membership were outlined in the Minister's "Open Letter".

Responsibility for the pilot projects already under way was transferred from the ministry to the PLA Advisory and Coordinating Group in February 1993.

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1. The formal definition of "prior learning assessment" is provided in Appendix 1.

The PLA Advisory and Coordinating Group

The Mandate

The PLA Advisory and Coordinating Group (PLA Group) reports to the Minister of Education and Training through the Council of Regents. The PLA Group's mandate is to facilitate the development of PLA services and policies of consistently high quality across the college system and to ensure that such services and policies treat students fairly and equitably. In fulfilling its mandate, the PLA Group has as its goals making community colleges more accessible to adult learners, helping those learners to develop sound educational goals and plans, and increasing the efficiency of postsecondary education and training by eliminating unnecessary duplication of learners' efforts. It is important to note that the PLA Group does not determine policy but submits recommendations to the Minister, who makes decisions on the actions to be taken.

The Minister decided that PLA services and policies were to be implemented at each of Ontario's community colleges, focusing on portfolio devel-

opment and the challenge process.[2] The PLA Group was to take responsibility for the coordination of several aspects of PLA implementation across the college system:

- priority setting and planning
- policy development
- funding
- training and marketing
- monitoring and evaluation
- research and pilot projects

In addition, the PLA Group is required to report annually to the Minister on the experiences of the colleges with PLA and on the following specific issues:

- the costs and benefits of extending PLA to selected non-college programs
- the effects of language competence on the portfolio process and the feasibility of developing approaches to portfolio development that are not dependent upon English- or French-language competence
- the long-term costs of implementing a systematic approach to the evaluation of foreign academic credentials for the purpose of assessing academic equivalencies at the college level
- the development of a process for upgrading and supplementary programs for foreign-trained students who need additional education or training to enter professions or trades

The PLA Group adopted a series of implementation principles[3] to guide its work in fulfilling its mandate:

A high-quality system of prior learning assessment, which is fair, consistent, and accessible, is essential to the integrity of college credentials. To this end, implementation of prior learning assessment in Ontario's colleges should uphold the following principles:

– Decision making with respect to PLA implementation should reflect full consideration of the interests of all relevant stakeholders.

– PLA policies should facilitate consistency in credit awards throughout the college system.

B orka, her husband and two young sons emigrated as refugees from war-torn Yugoslavia in 1993. In Bosnia, Borka had been a teacher both at the elementary and secondary level. Borka has now completed 5 subjects towards her diploma with an "A" average. Currently she works as a travel consultant while attending Seneca College at night and looks forward to completing her diploma and finding full-time employment in the field of early childhood education. Borka says: "The Portfolio Development Course helped me to organize my knowledge and learning and improve my resume writing skills. It was very helpful in deciding what my strengths and weaknesses are and also to understand the Canadian way of thinking. Now it is much easier for me to talk about what I have done and what I know."

– Borka, Seneca College

2. These terms are defined in Appendix 1.

3. These principles were adopted by the PLA Group on February 24, 1994 (PLA-94/02-06).

- Criteria for awarding credit should be no more or less rigorous than the criteria used in assessing learning acquired in courses provided through colleges.
- Prior learning assessment practices and procedures should facilitate college recognition of prior learning.
- Aboriginal learners should have access to Aboriginal-specific PLA processes which are consistent with Aboriginal learning processes, values, cultures, and community needs. These processes should be designed, delivered, and approved by Aboriginal people/communities.
- Faculty and staff involved in PLA and related activities should be appropriately trained to provide high-quality prior learning assessments and related services.
- PLA implementation should be facilitated though regular communications among colleges.
- PLA standards, policies, and procedures should be public, having regard for the requirements of all relevant legislation.
- Assessments of prior learning should be subject to appropriate appeal processes.
- Monitoring and evaluation of PLA activities should be ongoing.
- All adult learners who meet PLA eligibility criteria should have access to prior learning assessment and related college activities.
- Outreach to potential PLA beneficiaries should be an integral part of Ontario's PLA activities.

Membership

Membership in the PLA Advisory and Coordinating Group is voluntary. The group is chaired by a member of the Council of Regents and comprises ten representatives from within the college system and ten representatives from outside that system. Of the twenty voting members, four are francophones. Generally, the composition of the PLA Group reflects the diversity of Ontario's population, including male and female representatives from various racial, ethnic, regional, and sectoral groups and groups with special needs. Several liaison members ensure that PLA policies and procedures appropriately reflect the needs and concerns of organizations and groups affected by them.

As well, two members act as liaison members of the College Standards and Accreditation Council (CSAC), one at the CSAC board and the other at its Program Standards Committee, and ensure that information is shared between the PLA Group and CSAC.[4]

As is apparent in the membership list for 1993/94 (on pages 2-4), some changes have occurred in the membership patterns. Franchophone membership has been affected by the creation of two boards of governors for the new French-language colleges, the dismantling of the Advisory Committee on Francophone Affairs/Comité consultatif des affaires francophones (ACFA/CCAF), and the creation of the new Franco-Ontarian Education and Training Council/Conseil de l'éducation et de la formation franco-ontariennes (CEFFO). Community representation has also reflected change.

Community Partnership

Community involvement is vital in ensuring the success of prior learning assessment. In order to encourage community involvement and partnership in PLA, the PLA Group maintains an ongoing dialogue with community members and groups, including business, labour, and local government agencies. The PLA Secretariat often attends community functions in order to present information on PLA and to receive input from the community in further developing PLA policies and procedures. Thus, community participation ensures that the broadest perspective possible is brought to the consideration of implementation issues, including recruitment, counselling, and the delivery of portfolio development courses.

While community partners have participated in pilot projects, on training committees, on college PLA committees, and in policy development, the PLA Group sees increased collaboration as possible and necessary in the coming years. Much of this collaboration must take place at the local college level, although efforts to encourage it must receive central support.

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4. In his "Open Letter" the Minister stipulated that the PLA Group include a liaison member nominated by the CSAC. The CSAC board later decided that this liaison function could be best performed by those two PLA Group representatives.

Meetings

In June 1993, the orientation meeting of the PLA Group was held; it was followed by nine monthly meetings, open to the public, throughout 1993/94, excluding the summer months. Agenda items at these full-day meetings progressed from orientation and PLA Group operating procedures to substantive PLA issues.

Among the guidelines for operating procedures adopted by the PLA Group were the following:

- Decisions would be based on consensus as far as possible and would proceed to a vote only as a last resort.

- Proxies would be discouraged in order to minimize disruption.

- Communications on behalf of the PLA Group would be undertaken by designated spokespersons.

- A quorum for PLA Group meetings would consist of four internal, four external, and three liaison members.

Committees were formed to ensure that important issues related to prior learning assessment were examined in depth:

- The Academic Subcommittee deals with academic issues, including policies and training. In 1993/94, this subcommittee, chaired by Marilyn Wang, comprised Karen Lior, Marilyn Black-Lambert, Brenda Kearney, Jane Kirkwood, and Amy Thornton.

- The Francophone Subcommittee, as stipulated in the Minister's letter to the Chair of the Council of Regents (see Appendix 2), deals with all issues that specifically affect the French-language and bilingual colleges and those issues of interest to the francophone community. In 1993/94, it was chaired by Michel Ferland and its members were Trudy Bolduc, Rolande Faucher, Danitsa Meunier, and Sébastien N'Singi.

- The Implementation Support Subcommittee deals with funding, monitoring, communications, and marketing issues. In 1993/94, it was chaired by Tom Ramautarsingh, and its members were Jane Kirkwood and Martha Casson.

- The Executive Committee, comprising the chair of the PLA Group and the chairs of the three subcommittees, meets as required to deal with matters related to process.

PLA Activities at Colleges

Several times during 1993/94, the PLA Secretariat solicited information from the colleges to be gathered from surveys and anecdotal reports; this information was to be used in developing profiles of PLA implementation. In March 1993, subsequent to the Minister's announcement that PLA would be implemented across the college system, and prior to the September commencement date set for implementation, colleges were asked to provide information about their levels of PLA activities (see Table 1). The reports indicated that most colleges had taken some action in preparation for the adoption of formalized PLA activities; however, very few colleges were fully prepared to offer formalized PLA services; those PLA activities in place were often ad hoc in nature; and planning for the implementation of PLA on a college-wide basis was very limited.

Another survey, conducted in September 1993 (see Table 2), showed that moderate progress had been made in implementing PLA activities. In general, colleges had begun to assess the resources available to accommodate those activities and to develop implementation plans, and some colleges were already offering PLA services. A yardstick of the progress made was the fact that all colleges responding to the survey had hired a PLA facilitator[5] and were preparing to offer a portfolio development course, and most colleges responding had increased their efforts in promoting PLA within their individual college communities. The progress of college participation in PLA and the provision of PLA services in 1993/94 is shown in Figure 1 and 2, respectively.

At the same time that progress was being made, issues of concern began to emerge. The most-often cited were those related to the PLA facilitators' need for training in order to deliver the portfolio development courses and to conduct assessments effectively and fairly; the pressures created by the September 1994 target of 50 per cent of courses being eligible for the challenge process; the time constraints on PLA facilitators in preparing the colleges for PLA implementation; and various issues related to cost, faculty workload, and policy and procedure.

Many of these issues have been addressed locally, or centrally by the PLA Group or the Minister; resolution is being actively pursued for those issues that remain.

PLA Offices

As of September 1993, grant funding was provided to each college to appoint a staff member as a PLA facilitator, with responsibility for coordinating the implementation of PLA within the college. Most colleges had already made these appointments in anticipation of the official province-wide implementation of PLA. Whereas, before May 1993, few colleges had established PLA offices, by the end of 1993/94, each Ontario college had either an independent PLA office or a PLA office within a department. Several colleges have established PLA offices as part of academic services, access divisions, planning departments, or learning centres, thus placing PLA activities in a larger context and providing access to additional staff support.

Table 1: Summary of Colleges' PLA Activities by Order of Prevalence
(Data from survey of colleges, March 1993)

Activity Categories	Number of Colleges Taking Some Action	Number of Colleges Planning to Act
Preparation undertaken for challenge goal of 50 per cent	18	2
Local PLA committee in place and active	17	3
College-wide PLA awareness activities conducted by college	17	2
Past participation in PLA training of more than one staff member	15	2
Development of PLA policies/procedures under way	14	1
OPSEU represented on PLA committee and/or involved in selecting faculty representative(s)	12	4
PLA implementation plan in progress	11	4
Portfolio development course on offer	6	15
Preparation to hire or hiring of PLA facilitator completed	5	12

5. A list of PLA facilitators in Ontario colleges as at June 1994 is provided in Appendix 4.

Table 2: System Summary of PLA Actions as at September 29, 1993

(Data from sixteen colleges only)

Facilitator Status

Number of facilitators hired	16
Number of facilitators from:	
Faculty	13
Administration	1
Support	1

PLA Offerings This Term

Number of colleges offering portfolio development course	16
Number of generic portfolio courses this term	3
Number of program-specific portfolio courses this term	0
Number of portfolio courses this term offered as:	
Day program	3
Evening program	7
Continuing education	12
Other (e.g., distance education)	1
Number of colleges providing group PLA orientation	11
Number of colleges providing individual PLA orientation	4
Number of candidates attending orientation to date	380

Promotional Actions

Number of colleges working with companies or community organizations to identify PLA candidates	8
Number of colleges promoting PLA	14
Types of promotion (by number of colleges):	
Internal presentations	10
External presentations	6
PLA brochures	5
Continuing Education or regular college calendar	8

Figure 1: College Participation in PLA, 1993/94

Figure 2: PLA Services Provided, 1993/94

The establishment of PLA offices, along with the appointment of PLA facilitators, shows that attention to PLA implementation has intensified. In addition, the support that colleges provide to their PLA offices is an indication of their growing commitment to PLA activities. This college support takes several forms: hiring of support staff and others to work in PLA offices; adjusting organizational patterns to accommodate PLA offices; and equipping and providing extra funding for PLA offices. By June 1994, eleven colleges had provided additional staff to support their PLA activities. In terms of equipment and funding, most PLA offices have access to computers and e-mail systems that connect them to other colleges and to the PLA Secretariat, whereas the funding varies. Seven colleges reported that their PLA offices had operating budgets that exceeded the funding allocated by the ministry to support the work of PLA facilitators, and a few colleges committed capital funds to establish their PLA offices. Many colleges provided a range of additional funding.

PLA Committees: Composition and Mandate

All Ontario colleges have appointed PLA committees, most in response to the Ontario Council of Regents' PLA Discussion Paper, the Minister's announcement of system-wide PLA implementation, or receipt of approval to undertake a PLA pilot project. The names of these committees vary – from panels, councils, and task forces, to working groups – as do numbers of members – the smallest reported a membership of six, the largest twenty-two. In terms of committee representation, colleges generally attempted to reflect the diversity of divisions and departments for which PLA has relevance without expanding into unwieldiness, and some colleges invited representation from student, community, and local business stakeholders.

The committees' mandate includes the development of PLA policies and procedures and implementation strategies, the monitoring and evaluation of implementation, and the promotion of PLA within the individual college. At some colleges, the mandate is formal and, at others, is still evolving. Reporting protocols vary, although most often the committee chair – often the PLA facilitator – reports to the vice-president, academic. In
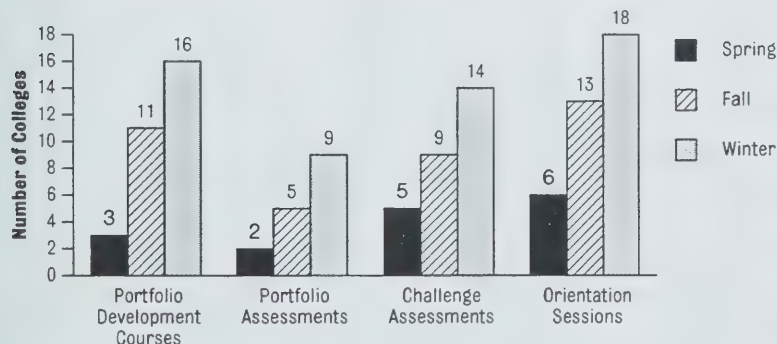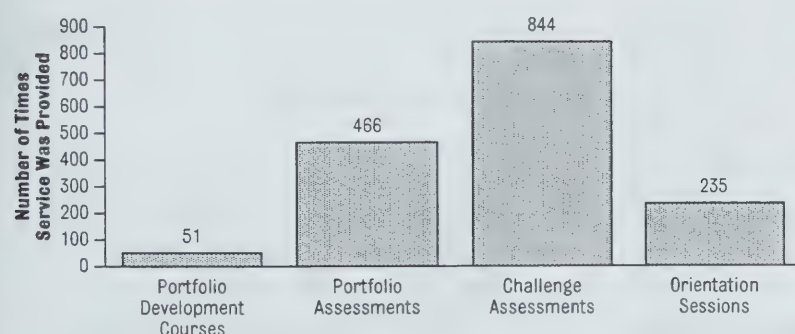
other instances, the committee reports to the director of continuing education, the dean or dean's committee, the policy and planning committee, the college council, the director of access, or the director of staff development. At one college, the committee reports to the PLA facilitator.

PLA committees devoted a considerable amount of their time in 1993/94 to investigating and developing policies and procedures for their colleges.

"P*LA is truly a motivational experience from which most of my academic and career decisions are based and will continue to guide me throughout my career.*

"In September 1993, I started PLA feeling a little skeptical; wondering how everything would evolve. PLA seemed 'too good to be true', and I will admit, I felt doubtful and excited all at the same time. I believe subconsciously, I was trying not to get my hopes up too high for fear of failing. Unknown to me at the time, PLA would be the beginning of a series of events that would change my whole outlook on life forever.

"PLA will probably be one of the most challenging courses that I will ever take. Self evaluation and self reflection is one of the hardest tasks that anyone will ever be asked to do. You have to be true to yourself and others; giving yourself credit where credit is due.

"Preparing a portfolio is no small task – the portfolio consists of materials and attestations of past working experiences. There is a lot of planning and preparation involved in a portfolio; however, it is all worthwhile. As a result of my hard work, I was able to obtain 41 credits towards the Office Administration Executive Diploma. This achievement, in itself, was an inspiration and a reason to pursue my education and career goals.

"With a few courses left to take, I will be eligible to graduate in December 1995 and I am proud to say I will have achieved my Office Administration Diploma. I intend to pursue my education at the University level and continue to grow as an individual. My goal is to obtain a BA and enter teachers college so that I may be able to help others in reaching their goals."

– Tracy, Canadore College

Ten colleges reported that PLA policies had been approved; twelve colleges reported that their policies and procedures remained at the draft stage; and one college reported having opted to use guidelines only. Several colleges were implementing and testing draft policies and procedures, and others were awaiting direction from the ministry before taking action.

As part of their mandate, PLA committees developed PLA mission statements or reviewed their colleges' existing mission statements to determine whether or not they included PLA goals. Generally, such mission statements include a commitment to making educational opportunities accessible to adults with diverse backgrounds and needs, and recognize the importance of lifelong learning. PLA mission statements serve as a means of focusing the efforts made by PLA committees to develop and implement policies and procedures.

PLA policies and procedures in development generally relate to learner access, the definition of key terms (for example, "advanced standing" and "transfer credit"), the roles and responsibilities of PLA participants, academic and administrative standards, the appeals process, and courses eligible for challenge.

PLA Training Sessions

In 1993/94, colleges provided a significant number of training sessions, primarily targeted for those being introduced to PLA, and PLA practitioners who are developing learning outcomes and developing courses to be challenged and assessed. In total, more than two hundred formal PLA training events were held in 1993/94, not including meetings between PLA facilitators and program coordinators, department heads, or other faculty. These training events were attended by more than 3000 people, mainly college faculty; in addition, special training and awareness sessions were provided for deans, program coordinators, and other administrators, and representatives from partner organizations, such as secondary-school counsellors and help centres.

Most PLA facilitators based their training sessions on resource materials developed by the PLA Secretariat and during PLA pilot projects. Several colleges reported having received support from their human resources development departments

or their PLA committees. Some colleges requested that the PLA Secretariat be directly involved in their sessions, and others sought trainers from outside the college system or from outside Canada. Reliance on non-Canadian assistance was more prevalent during the early implementation period; by the end of 1993/94, it had become extremely rare. The French-language training program relied in large part on Quebec-based trainers and resource materials.

Recruitment and Enrolment

By the end of 1993/94, the range of PLA services on offer by colleges had increased significantly beyond those available prior to summer 1993. In summer 1993, three colleges offered sections of the portfolio development course, and the four courses offered had 35 registrants. Some challenge processes were being offered by five colleges, with a resulting total of 172 challenge assessments. Six colleges offered PLA orientation sessions – information ses-

Figure 3: Aggregate Learner Participation in PLA, 1993/94

Figure 4: Participation in Assessments, 1993/94
(Portfolio and challenge assessments are aggregated.)

sions on PLA services, delivered to individuals or groups of potential PLA candidates to facilitate their PLA participation decisions – which were attended by 90 participants.

Fall 1993 saw a significant growth in PLA activity at colleges. Eleven colleges taught 18 sections of portfolio development courses to 185 registrants; 9 colleges offered challenge processes, leading to a total of 248 challenge assessments; and 14 colleges offered PLA orientation sessions to a total of 763 participants.

However, winter saw the greatest increase in college PLA activity. Sixteen colleges taught 29 sections of portfolio development courses to 224 registrants; 424 challenge assessments were completed; and 17 colleges offered PLA orientation sessions to 913 participants.

In summary, in 1993/94, 51 sections of the portfolio development course were offered to 444 learners; 815 learners were assessed using the portfolio and challenge methods, for a total of 466 portfolio and 844 challenge assessments; and 235 orientation sessions to recruit participants for the portfolio development course and PLA assessments were held for almost 2000 potential PLA participants. Figures 3 and 4 show 1993/94 aggregate learner participation in PLA and participation in assessments, respectively.

These levels of participation in PLA are even more significant in light of the conservative approach colleges took to marketing PLA services. Colleges were relatively reticent about promoting PLA because their primary commitment was to ensuring that they could deliver quality PLA services. As a result, colleges gave priority to the training of faculty and other staff and the development of policies and procedures that would lead to the effective and efficient implementation of PLA, and they restricted their promotional efforts to listing PLA in continuing-education and full-time calendars, and publishing articles about PLA in local newsletters. This promotional focus reached college staff and those currently enrolled in colleges. However, some colleges expanded this target audience, and developed brochures about PLA, participated in interviews on local radio stations or in local newspapers, or met with area businesses and industries, school boards, and other stakeholder organizations to increase awareness of and to promote participation in PLA.
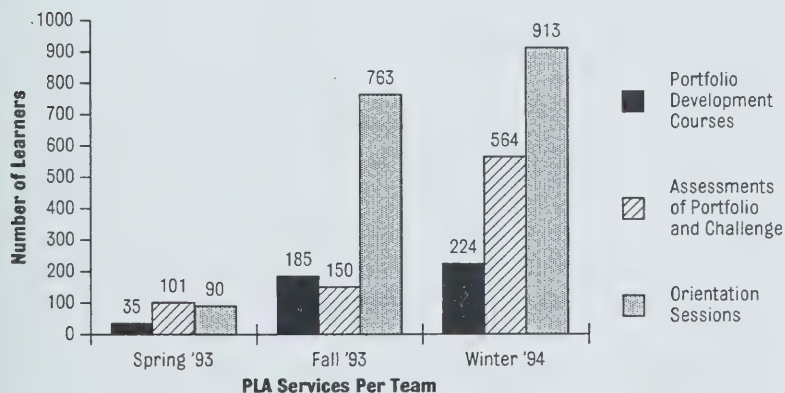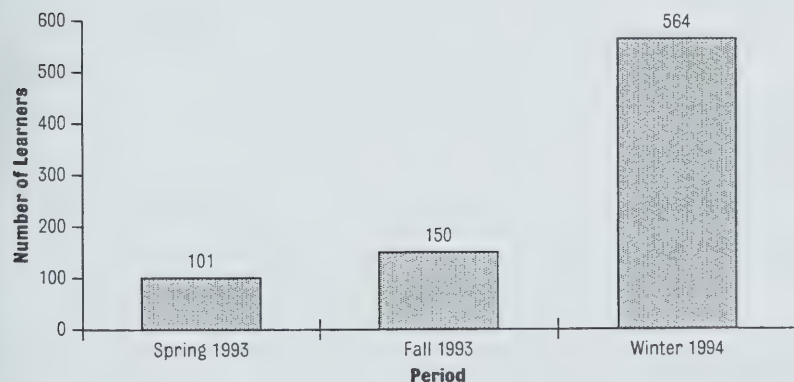
Conservative promotion resulted in some colleges reporting that they had difficulty attracting learners to the portfolio development course – a problem that stemmed, as well, from the newness of the course. As a solution, some colleges renamed their portfolio development course, selecting creative new titles that are more reflective of course outcomes and that enable learners to identify them more readily with their own needs. Examples include "Profile Your Skills and Abilities" (Mohawk); "Sociology of Learning: Portfolio Development" (Humber); "A Portfolio Approach to Career and Educational Planning" (Algonquin); and "The Portfolio – How to Develop Your Lifetime Inventory of Learning" (Northern).

The Portfolio Development Course

The portfolio development course, fundable by the Ministry of Education and Training and frequently offered through continuing education, is designed to assist learners to analyse and document their learning, plan their vocational and/or academic careers, and request college credits for their prior learning. Although there are standard concepts accepted within the portfolio approach, there is no standard curriculum. The course is usually tailored to meet the needs of a specific constituency of learners and can be administrated by academic level or program area in order to have status as a credit course. In a few instances, portfolio development courses were designed as part of a general education curriculum.

In 1993/94, the portfolio development courses on offer were credit courses. They generally comprised forty-five instruction hours, were taught by the college PLA facilitator or team-taught by two or more teachers, and were directed at a diverse group of learners with a variety of academic and vocational experiences. A few of the courses were more narrowly targeted for specific groups – at workplaces, in the community, within an industry, in a particular college program, or those having a particular language need. Off-campus courses were delivered at work sites and in collaboration with community and labour organizations – for example, General Motors (Oshawa), Correctional Services Canada (institutions in Belleville and Kingston), and the Metro Labour Education Centre (Toronto).

As discussed above, enrolment figures for portfolio development courses were generally low (see Figure 5). Colleges experimented with various target audiences and course designs, seeking the most effective match of learner and curriculum. In this respect, innovations in delivering the course were explored, among them teaching the portfolio development courses to homogeneous populations, as part of existing program offerings, and as integral parts of preparatory courses. The results obtained through the exploration of these innovations should be apparent in the coming year.

Networking

Regional PLA networks were established in fall 1993. PLA facilitators indicated their interest in structuring networks, and the PLA Secretariat provided an opportunity at the four regional training sessions held in October and November 1993. Regional PLA networks were originally conceived of as associations, comprising PLA facilitators and other college personnel with an interest or role in PLA, that would generate long-term benefits for PLA practitioners, including information sharing, the fostering of collaboration on various aspects of implementation, the generation of new approaches within the field of PLA, the development of PLA leadership, the promotion of PLA, and the maintenance of colleges' focus on PLA and its major objectives.

"The PLA process was very fair and it has saved me a great deal of time and money. Preparing my portfolio was very challenging as I had to think about my knowledge, skills and attitudes in a new way and then write about them. I am used to talking about my experience but it was challenging to write about what I have actually learned. PLA is a major advantage for people who have relevant experience to earn college credits."

– Paula, Seneca College

Figure 5: Participation in Portfolio Development Courses

Figure 5: Participation in Portfolio Development Courses. Number of Learners: Spring 1993 = 35; Fall 1993 = 185; Winter 1994 = 224.

The PLA Advisory and Coordinating Group recognized the official status of the regional PLA networks.[6] It regularly solicited their responses to policy documents and other initiatives throughout 1993/94 and encouraged and sponsored some regional activities. For example, in spring 1994, $20 000 was made available to fund proposals from the regional networks regarding the development of methods for sharing challenge processes within the regions.

French-language and bilingual colleges also developed an active network, providing one another with support and freely exchanging information and materials. Provincial training sessions were held that focused on the training needs of colleges' francophone staff.

Another type of PLA networking that emerged was Humber College's PLA electronic discussion group, "PLA-L listserv", for PLA facilitators. Electronic mail (e-mail) sent to "PLA-L@ADMIN.HUMBERC.ON.CA" is automatically distributed by the server to all subscribers, who can then reply to all members of the "listserv". Reports indicate that this electronic discussion group is having success in the productive exchange of feedback and information.

During the regional training sessions held in fall 1993, representatives from the colleges met to form working groups, set objectives for the groups, and plan activities achievable in at least the short term. Two regional networks held regular meetings throughout the year, whereas the others met less regularly. Holding meetings of regional networks on a regular basis is made difficult by a number of problems, many of them related to the lack of financial support for regional activities. Conference calls, travel, staff release time, the issuing of communiqués, the arranging of meeting space – all have costs attached.

6. The members of the regional networks are listed in Appendix 5.

PLA Pilot Projects

Research is an explicit part of the PLA Group's mandate (see Appendix 2). The Minister identified four specific research areas to be explored by the PLA Group. While some of them remain to be examined in subsequent years, in several areas research has been initiated in 1993/94.

Pilot projects, funded by the Ministry of Education and Training, that are now under way at the colleges have been instrumental in developing the PLA initiative. Since PLA is unique in the college system, in terms of its approaches to academic practice, administrative procedures, and the potential impact on learners, pilot projects offer an opportunity to explore the effects of PLA in collaboration with those who will experience them directly and who have the expertise and perspective required to evaluate the success of PLA implementation.

The extent to which each funded PLA pilot project has contributed to system-wide implementation is examined below. PLA pilot projects have been commissioned under three phases of Ministry of Education and Training funding, each based on a specific operative need of the college system. Similarly, each had its own guidelines and accountability mechanisms. The first two phases of funded PLA pilot projects were initiated before the PLA Group was established, but are included in this report because they were completed under the supervision of the PLA Group.

The PLA Group and PLA Secretariat provided some opportunities, by distributing the projects' final reports, for other faculty, college, and community partners to share the information obtained. As well, the PLA Group sponsored presentations on some projects at various conferences. Beyond that, PLA pilot-project results have been used by colleges, universities, and agencies in other provinces, including Newfoundland, Manitoba, Alberta, Nova Scotia, and British Columbia, in their work on similar assessment initiatives.

Phase I, 1992/93

The first phase of PLA pilot projects was initiated in 1991/92, when the PLA Advisory Committee was researching the implications of implementing PLA on a system-wide basis. At that time, little was known about PLA among college personnel and students, and the Minister had not yet set the framework for its implementation. After consultation with the PLA Advisory Committee, the ministry decided to fund ten pilot projects, at a cost of $913 191, that would familiarize colleges with many aspects of the principles and practices of PLA. These projects were supervised directly by the ministry.

1. Establishment of Prior Learning Assessment at Algonquin College

Lead College: Algonquin College of Applied Arts and Technology

Ministry Grant: $81 000

This project involved the design of a portfolio development course to be used in continuing education (business) and applied arts. In addition to experimenting with this course and evaluating the portfolios, the projects also generated policies, procedures, and guidelines to support the PLA practices at Algonquin College.

Other colleges have since modified Algonquin's resource manual, *Prior Learning Assessment – Program for College-Wide Implementation (Policies, Procedures, and Guidelines)*. The project staff participated on the provincial PLA Pre-implementation Committee, which identified policy issues that pertain to the entire college system. The results of that committee's work continue to be used in policy development that is being undertaken by the PLA Group and the PLA Secretariat.

Algonquin's resource manual can be obtained for $12 by contacting Diane Shaughnessy or Heather Ryan at Algonquin College, 1385 Woodroffe Ave., Nepean, ON K2G 1V8; phone (613)727-4723, ext. 7027.

2. Trades to Technology: A Prior Learning Assessment Pilot Project for Transition from Skilled Trades to Engineering Technology

Lead College: Durham College of Applied Arts and Technology

Ministry Grant: $76 400

The objective of this project was to develop, test, and evaluate a strategy by which apprenticeship programs, technology-specific industrial training, and workplace experiential learning could be assessed and credited towards a diploma in technology. Durham College and General Motors, Oshawa, collaborated in reviewing GM's trades apprenticeship programs and assessing employees' needs. The project also identified curriculum needed to bridge the gap between the apprenticeship and diploma programs in Electronic or Mechanical Technology. For example, mathematics was identified as an area of special need for employees seeking admission to Durham's Electronic or Mechanical Technology programs. The project also established a protocol for proceeding with PLA for corporations. As a result, GM's corporate executives, and others, increased their awareness of PLA practices and benefits.

Durham College continues to collaborate with General Motors in providing PLA services to its employees. In 1993, forty General Motors employees participated in two portfolio development courses held on GM premises. Portfolios developed during these courses were assessed by Durham College faculty for college-subject credits.

Technology programs at most colleges are increasing their interest and participation in PLA and are developing procedures for working with other corporations. They may be guided by the protocol presented in Durham's project report, *Trades to Technology: Transition from Skilled Trades to Engineering Technology*, which can be obtained by contacting Marylyn West Moynes, at Durham College, Box 385, 2000 Simcoe St. N., Oshawa, ON L1H 7L7; phone (905)721-2000.

3. Prior Learning Assessment for Co-operative Education Work Term Credit

Lead College: Georgian College of Applied Arts and Technology

Ministry Grant: $44 550

This project developed and tested criteria and procedures for PLA as it applies to experiential credit for co-operative education. The project recruited forty-three learners who had previous work experience for which they had requested co-operative education credit. Of those who initiated the process, twenty-nine withdrew and three gained a credit each through PLA.

A review of the project's report, *Georgian College Prior Learning Assessment for Co-operative Education Credit – Final Report*, suggested that the issue of awarding PLA credit for co-op work is not an easy one to resolve. Some of the difficulties may have arisen from the fact that learners expected a quick and simple comparison of their work experience with learning that the colleges facilitate through co-op programs. There is little doubt that the project made this issue transparent enough to influence Georgian and other colleges to re-evaluate how they should address PLA and co-op education in the future.

To obtain copies of the project report, contact Katherine McDonald, at Georgian College, One Georgian Drive, Barrie, ON L4M 3X9; phone (705)728-2000.

> **"P**LA is an excellent opportunity for individuals to gain credits for work experience. It seemed to take me a long time to figure out what was expected of me, as a student in the PLA classroom. However, it's beginning to come together."
>
> **– Anonymous, Canadore College**

4. Training of Assessors

Lead College: Georgian College of Applied Arts and Technology

Collaborators: Centennial, George Brown, Humber, Seneca, and Sheridan colleges

Ministry Grant: $124 619

This project developed manuals to assist college staff in assessing prior learning. Four of these manuals – *So You have Been Asked to Assess Prior Experiential Learning!; Principles, Methods and Resources for Teaching and Facilitating the Portfolio Development Course – Resource Manual; A Practitioner's Manual for the Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning: Principles, Methods and Resources;* and *Portfolio-Assisted Assessment of Prior Learning: Workshop Overview* – have been circulated widely throughout Ontario's college system and those of other provinces now engaged in PLA. As learning tools, the manuals have the potential to assist college faculty in gaining awareness of the concepts, procedures, and methods related to PLA. Project staff also worked on the PLA Pre-implementation Committee. The project's work was used as the basis for a workshop entitled "Teaching the Portfolio Development Course", conducted as part of provincial PLA training in May 1993. Colleges continue to integrate these resources into their locally developed PLA training programs.

Copies of the project manuals can be obtained at a cost of $10 each by contacting Wendy Crawford, at Georgian College, One Georgian Drive, Barrie, ON L4M 3X9; phone (705)722-5136.

5. Prior Learning Assessment: Joint Pilot Project

Lead College: Humber College of Applied Arts and Technology

Collaborators: Conestoga, St. Lawrence, and Sir Sandford Fleming colleges, and the Sectoral Skills Council

Ministry Grant: $124 569

The purpose of this project was to develop a portfolio development course for employees of the electrical/electronic manufacturing industry. Each of the four colleges arranged to collaborate with a local employer to provide portfolio development

instruction for its workers. The Sectoral Skills Council had a major role in promoting the project to the companies' administrators and workers.

Sir Sandford Fleming College focused its portfolio course for fifteen learners in technical programs at the technician or technologist level. The course was delivered at General Electric over a thirteen-week period. Additional assistance was provided for persons who were unable to complete their portfolios during that period.

St. Lawrence College attempted to establish a portfolio course at Phillips Cables Limited but was forced to revise its plans owing to the unavailability of time within workers' schedules and conflicts with other pre-existing programs and obligations at the plant. In place of the course, an In-Plant Prior Learning Advising Service was set up, focusing on career planning, academic advice, and portfolio development, and offering individualized service on seven scheduled dates between 9:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. Participation was voluntary, and twenty employees made use of the service, attending two or three sessions. The participants required different levels of service, ranging from referrals to the local board of education for Mature Student Assessment, to portfolio development and assessment. One candidate had fulfilled the graduation requirements for two programs.

Conestoga College established a twelve-week portfolio course at Inglis Limited – Cambridge Division. Four persons began the course, and two completed it and their personal portfolios.

Humber College attempted to work with two companies in Metropolitan Toronto. Neither showed sufficient interest to sustain a portfolio development course. The project manager's report, *Prior Learning Assessment Pilot Project: Final Report*, discusses the generic and specific issues that led to this outcome.

On the whole, the project did not meet its stated objectives; none the less, the difficulties encountered were instructive, illustrating the need for procedures in recruitment and that collaboration required particular preparation. It also pointed out some of the issues involved in providing in-house educational services at the workplace. The lessons this project provided have been incorporated into PLA training for practitioners and have been studied by those undertaking subsequent projects. It

has been made clear that developing PLA awareness in the staff of the college and partner organization is essential before a joint assessment process can be implemented and that concrete organizational structures are necessary to ensure project success.

Copies of the project report can be obtained by contacting Rick Embree, at Humber College, 205 Humber College Blvd., Etobicoke, ON M9W 5L7; phone (416)675-5061.

6. La reconnaissance des acquis à La Cité collégiale (PLA at La Cité collégiale)

Lead College: La Cité collégiale

Ministry Grant: $96 590

The primary goal of this project was to develop PLA processes and instruments that would be suitable for use by the francophone college community and bilingual institutions. The project undertook to investigate PLA policies and procedures, assessment procedures and instruments, and PLA training in light of this goal.

The project organized nine PLA training sessions in French. Altogether, fourteen days of training sessions were held during June 1992; May, June, and November 1993; and May 1994. The nine sessions held in Ottawa and Sudbury were attended by 134 participants. Training topics included introduction to PLA, assessor training, and training for teachers of portfolio development courses.

The project is ongoing and is under the supervision of the Ministry of Education and Training.

7. College Credit for Industry-Based Courses

Lead College: Lambton College of Applied Arts and Technology

Ministry Grant: $48 750

The purpose of this project was to develop tools and processes for evaluating industry-based courses to determine whether to grant credit for them towards a diploma. The project created an Industrial Management Program (a diploma program for supervisors), which is still offered at the college, and a model for assessing the equivalency of industry-based courses and programs relative to

college credit courses or programs. Lambton College collaborated with six major corporations in Sarnia during the project – namely, Dow Chemical Canada Inc., Sunoco Sarnia Refinery, ESSO Chemicals, Novacor Chemicals Canada Inc., Shell Refinery, and Polysar.

The project's Program Advisory Committee remains active today. Employees having successfully completed eligible industry-based courses get full credit for them in the Industrial Management Program. The exact number of persons enrolled in this program is difficult to determine since the program is offered, on a course-by-course basis, through continuing education, and no one has, as yet, graduated from it.

Lambton College continues to make conference presentations to inform other colleges of this project's results. The project report, *Final Report – College Credit for Industry-Based Courses*, will be used as a resource by the PLA Group as it prepares its report to the Minister on the feasibility of evaluating non-collegiate programs as a PLA method, one of four mandated studies the PLA Group will undertake. Copies of the project report can be obtained by contacting Terence Cameron, at Lambton College, 1457 London Rd., P.O. Box 969, Sarnia, ON N7T 7K4; phone (519)542-7751.

8. Prior Learning Assessment: A Three-Phased Proposal

Lead College: Loyalist College of Applied Arts and Technology

Ministry Grant: $85 500

During this project, Loyalist College worked with Correctional Services Canada, Ontario Division, to determine the needs of staff facing imminent career change, to investigate how those needs could begin to be addressed through a portfolio development course using the "whole person" approach, and to prepare and deliver training for assessors of portfolios. Prison For Women was the primary correctional participant and the institution at which the portfolio development course was delivered. Fifteen correctional workers participated in the course and assisted in evaluating its impact. Employees at seven secondary participating institu-

tions responded to a survey concerning employees' training needs and interest in portfolio development as an education-planning tool. There were 331 survey respondents.

Loyalist College has since delivered five courses at Prison For Women and at Correctional Services Canada headquarters in Kingston, Ontario. These courses were offered for credit by the General Arts and Sciences Department at Loyalist College, and included Program Design, two portfolio development courses, Interview Dynamics, and Career Development. Each course had an enrolment of between twelve and fifteen.

The project's staff submitted a paper on the project for presentation at the Council on Adult Experiential Learning (CAEL) Conference, held in Washington, DC, in November 1994. The paper was accepted, but funding was not available for the project staff to attend. They made a presentation outlining their work to graduate students at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education and to the Canadian Association of Adult Educators, in Vancouver. Copies of the project report, *Final Report: Prior Learning Assessment Three-Phased Pilot*

*C*hristine entered the PLA course in September 1994 for the purpose of "self discovery, introspection and goal clarification". Christine has recently experienced the death of a grandchild and was beginning to emerge from a period of instability and confusion. Over her life, she had acquired college-level learning in the areas of personnel management and training, office and administrative support, psycho-social sciences and crisis management. Christine completed her portfolio, but has not yet decided to submit it for assessment.
"I felt the PLA course was an excellent life-review and learning process. The exercise of committing myself and my goals to print, assisted me in conceptualizing and visualizing my past life and experiences and focusing on reality. I know now what I don't want to do and am energized to take the first steps towards my long term goals of becoming a psychologist."

– Christine, Algonquin College

Project – Needs Assessment, Participatory Evaluation and Research Evaluation Training, can be obtained by contacting Shirley Follen, at Loyalist College, P.O. Box 4200, Wallbridge Cres. – Loyalist Rd., Belleville, ON K8N 5B9; phone (613)969-1913, ext. 433.

9. Prior Learning Assessment Project Program

Lead College: Northern College of Applied Arts and Technology

Collaborator: Confederation College of Applied Arts and Technology

Ministry Grant: $110 000

During this project, Northern and Confederation colleges researched, developed, and delivered a set of instruments for assessing prior learning in the Developmental Services and Health Services fields. Fifty-six students participated in the project and, on average, through orientation and testing, reduced their clinical-experience requirement from twenty to eight days per person. Participants were all from the Post RNA Nursing program (located in thirteen Northern Ontario communities), and much of the project's work focused on the Care of the Adult course within that program.

Promotion of PLA among administrators, faculty, support staff, students, and health–care professionals in the participating colleges and other institutions was a direct result of this project's endeavours. The project also produced a number of resource documents:

- *Final Report on the Prior Learning Assessment Program*

- *Post RNA PLA Pilot Project Summative Report*

- *Care of the Adult Clinical Skills Assessment 1993*

- *Care of the Adult Clinical Skills Assessment 1993: Parts I, 2, and 3*

- *Recommendations for PLA Activity Within the Clinical Competencies (Gen 1020)*

- *Prior Learning Pre-assessment Workbook: Developmental Services Worker Program*

- *Prior Learning Assessment: Collège Northern College*

- *Student Handbook for GS 242: Portfolio Development for College Credit for Prior Learning*

- *PLA Challenge Exam and Exemption Criteria: Perinatal Nursing Certificate Program*

- *PLA Clinical Skills Inventory Checklist: WR170 Introductory Perinatal Nursing Clinical 1*

These resources are still in use in the Nursing and Developmental Services programs at the colleges that undertook the project and have been made available for use by other colleges as well. Copies of the project resource documents can be obtained, at prices ranging from $5 to $12, by contacting the Prior Learning Assessment Office, at Northern College, Highway 101 E., P.O. Box 2002, South Porcupine, ON P0N 1H0; phone (705)235-3211, ext. 251, or 1-800-461-2167.

10. Northern Colleges Regional PLA Network

Lead College: Sault College of Applied Arts and Technology

Collaborators: Cambrian, Canadore, Northern, and Confederation colleges

Ministry Grant: $120 913

This project developed a model for regional networking initiatives in PLA. The potential benefits of such an approach include consistency of standards and guidelines, and enhanced transferability of credits among regional institutions. Basing the work on the investigation of principles, policies, and procedures for implementing PLA, these colleges formed a coordination committee that guided the project, participated in training events, and began establishing, simultaneously, a PLA program in each participating college.

Collaboration among the colleges began a process of coordination of PLA development in the Northern Region. It also provided considerable background work for colleges and other institutions undertaking to establish PLA programs, investigate policies and procedures, or develop communication among institutions. The project report, *Northern Colleges PLA Pilot Project: Final Report*, was one of the earliest submitted, before PLA had been implemented to any significant degree at any college. The project made a major

contribution to the development of PLA at Sault and the other participating colleges. It is still being used by several colleges, and by the PLA Group and the PLA Secretariat in addressing policy issues. The Northern Network, comprising five northern colleges, was the first PLA regional network to be formed, and was an outgrowth of the work conducted on this project. Copies of the project report can be obtained by contacting Sandi Mills, at Sault College, P.O. Box 60, 443 Northern Ave., Sault Ste. Marie, ON P6A 5L3; phone (705)759-6774.

Phase II, 1993/94

In March 1993, a second phase of pilot projects was developed to research the extension of the portfolio process to English-as-a-second-language learners. Three of the four projects funded (for a total of $353 525) examined the language issue with respect to its relationship to successful completion of the portfolio development course. After a year of research and development, all but one of the projects were completed and had submitted their reports to the PLA Secretariat. The fourth project is nearing completion and has submitted the resources it has produced to date.

1. PLA Community Partnerships in Action

Lead College: Algonquin College of Applied Arts and Technology

Collaborators: Ontario College of Nurses and the Ottawa-Carleton Immigrant Services Organization

Ministry Grant: $98 016

This collaborative project developed PLA tools to assist immigrant health-care workers to obtain appropriate college credentials, and subsequent employment within the health-care sector. Algonquin College completed its work in June 1994. While there has not been sufficient time for the results of the project to be fully integrated into practices at other colleges, the project has already had a significant influence.

As documented in the project manual, *Prior Learning Assessment: Pilot Project Phase 2 – Community Partnerships in Action*, the project developed a three-part process to provide access to college programs and occupational practice – namely, instruction in English as a second language, portfolio instruction, and orientation to the health-care system and occupational practice in Ontario. An evaluation system was created that involves semi-structured interviews and simulated laboratory testing. Sixteen participants, all English-as-a-second-language speakers who had previous training and/or gained experience in health care outside Canada, developed portfolios for assessment and improved their English-language skills, and, where appropriate, applied for certification by the Ontario College of Nurses. Algonquin College's Health Science Department and the partner institutions increased their awareness of PLA through collaboration on this project.

Copies of the project manual can be obtained by contacting Marg Eisner or Diane Shaughnessy, at Algonquin College, 1385 Woodroffe Ave., Nepean, ON K2G 1V8; phone (613)727-9400.

2. Portfolio Development for Second-Language Speakers in Declining Industries

Lead College: George Brown College of Applied Arts and Technology

Collaborator: Metro Labour Education Centre (MLEC)

Ministry Grant: $99 681

George Brown College and the Metro Labour Education Centre jointly developed and delivered a sixty-hour portfolio development course for immigrant workers whose second language is English and who were either laid off or at risk of losing their jobs owing to the decline of the industries in which they worked. The course was delivered to participants in an off-campus location, the Metro Labour Education Centre, and was co-taught by college and MLEC staff. The participating workers, almost all of whom had been laid off by the same electrical/electronics plant, were assessed as having language skills at the Grade 5 to

Grade 7 level. After research was undertaken to determine the appropriateness of various language-testing instruments, the Canadian Academic Achievement Test B (CAAT B) and the Adult Basic Literacy Exam (ABLE) were selected for use in this project. Fourteen learners completed this experimental course and were found to have increased their language skills and developed a positive orientation to college and new vocations. The project manual, *Getting the Credit You Deserve*, developed for learners and teachers, includes exercises and classroom activities designed to introduce PLA, assist in the preparation of a chronological record and life-history paper, identify goals and form an educational plan, and document experiential learning.

During the course of the project, its staff participated in several events staged by George Brown College and various labour organizations, giving presentations on the project and gathering input from stakeholders. The project's findings will prove useful in reporting to the Minister on PLA for learners whose first language is not English and to other colleges and institutions.

Copies of the project manual can be obtained by contacting Dan Benson, at George Brown College Bookstore, P.O. Box 1015, Station B, Toronto, ON M5T 2T9; phone (416)867-2666.

3. Portfolio Development for Students of English as a Second Language

Lead College: Mohawk College of Applied Arts and Technology

Ministry Grant: $35 938

In this project, Mohawk College designed a portfolio development course, lasting 160 hours, for ESL learners; the course concurrently improved language skills and gave instruction in portfolio development. In recruiting candidates, information sessions were held and language skills assessed. Sixteen learners, most of them surpassing the minimum language competency level set by the project (CSAC Benchmark 5 in the skill areas of listening

and reading, and CSAC Benchmark 6 in the skill areas of writing and speaking) and having postsecondary education or work experience, participated. Fifteen participants completed portfolios, eleven continued in postsecondary studies, ten submitted portfolios for assessment, and eight were granted credits, in areas as diverse as Broadcast Journalism and Electronic Engineering Technology. As well, the project developed several testing instruments to be used in tandem with CSAC ESL Benchmarks. These documents are included in the project manual, *Portfolio Development for Students of English as a Second Language: Report on a Pilot Project*. This manual has been distributed to colleges, and its findings will be used by the PLA Group in working to resolve the issues concerning PLA for ESL speakers. Copies of the project manual can be obtained by contacting the PLA Office at Mohawk College, Fennell Ave. and West 5th, P.O. Box 2034, Hamilton, ON L8N 3T2; phone (905)575-2395.

4. Portfolio Development for Distance Learners – Live and Learn

Lead College: Seneca College of Applied Arts and Technology

Collaborators: Mohawk College and TVOntario

Ministry Grant: $119 890

In this project, Seneca and Mohawk colleges collaborated in creating a multimedia delivery approach to portfolio development. TVOntario later joined this partnership and provided funding

"This course has given me the motivation I need to continue my education. As an adult learner, I find that sometimes I feel like quitting when I think of how L-O-N-G it takes to complete a diploma program, part-time, and it is so refreshing to know that my past work experiences can be validated at this level, and that I do not need to sit through hours of classes of repetitious learning. It is also a cost savings for the ones who have to pay for their education. The inward analysis will be beneficial as well, in terms of interpersonal relations, and self esteem."**

– Anonymous, Canadore College

for the production of four half-hour television episodes on portfolio development.

The project is nearing completion, and testing of the television programs, the CD-ROM, and the printed workbooks is being conducted with public audiences and learners at several colleges. Further information about this project can be obtained by contacting Carol Henry, at Seneca College, 1750 Finch Ave. E., North York, ON M2J 2X5; phone (416)491-5050.

Phase III, January to June 1994

At the same time that second-phase pilot projects were preparing their reports, a third phase of projects, with a six-month completion time and funded for a total of $142 500, was investigating three issues identified as critical to the continued implementation of PLA in colleges: the training of PLA practitioners serving Aboriginal learners, the development of bias-free challenge processes, and the design and development of a PLA information system and training materials for college faculty on learning outcomes. Two of the third-phase pilot projects are complete, and the other two have requested extensions.

1. Information Systems for PLA Support

Lead College: Canadore College of Applied Arts and Technology

Ministry Grant: $44 500

In this project, Canadore College is developing an information system for gathering PLA-related data for use locally, at colleges, and centrally, by the Ministry of Eduation and Training and the Ontario Council of Regents. The project's goal is to identify ways to maximize use of extant data-collection systems to gather accurate and up-to-date information on the PLA experiences of colleges and learners. Although this project has not yet reported, consultation on a draft document is under way; the PLA Secretariat, which has jurisdiction over third-phase projects, continues to follow-up with the lead college.

This project's findings will be used by the PLA Group in making recommendations to the Minister on tracking procedures and mechanisms for recording and evaluating PLA activities within colleges and across the college system.

2. Responsive PLA Challenge Processes

Lead College: Centennial College of Applied Arts and Technology

Ministry Grant: $36 000

In this project, Centennial College and its partners developed guidelines for reducing bias in PLA challenge processes. Based on a literature review and a survey of 3190 Centennial students and 156 faculty members, five reporting documents have been produced, explaining PLA methods, identifying challenge methods that learners perceive to be biased, and providing a demographic analysis of learner perceptions. Project findings are expected to be useful in eliminating bias in, and thereby improving, PLA challenge processes.

Copies of the reporting documents – *PLA Challenge Process Adventure Tour* (interactive computer program); *The PLA Challenge Process Adventure Tour; Centennial College Survey Report on Evaluation Methods; The PLA Challenge Process Adventure Tour: Recognizing Student Diversity – Just*

the Facts; and *The PLA Challenge Process Adventure Tour: Recognizing Student Diversity – Bibliography –* can be obtained by contacting Betty McCulloch, at Centennial College, P.O. Box 631, Station A, 651 Warden Ave., Scarborough, ON M1K 5E9; phone (416)694-3241.

3. Aboriginal Access to Postsecondary Education

Lead College: Loyalist College of Applied Arts and Technology

Collaborator: First Nations Technical Institute

Ministry Grant: $45 000

In this project, Loyalist College, in partnership with the First Nations Technical Institute, is developing a culturally appropriate PLA training manual for practitioners working with Aboriginal learners. The project deadline was extended to December 1994 in order to allow the project to seek broader consultation.

4. Creating Challenge Processes: A Self-Directed Learning Package for Faculty

Lead College: Niagara College of Applied Arts and Technology

Ministry Grant: $17 000

In this project, Niagara College developed a training manual, *Creating Learning Outcomes: A Faculty-Directed Process*, to assist faculty in preparing learning outcomes for courses eligible for challenge. The original project focus – self-directed learning resources – shifted to group training in the preparation of course learning outcomes, a subject in which a high level of interest has already been expressed by college staff involved in PLA. The manual, submitted in October 1994, has been distributed to all colleges. Copies of the manual can be obtained by contacting Marti Jurmain or Brian Keppy, at Niagara College, P.O. Box 1005, Woodlawn Rd., Welland, ON L3B 5S2; phone (905)735-2211.

B *arbara enrolled in the portfolio development course, PLA5000, in September 1993. She presently holds a middle management position as a Financial Systems Analyst.*

"I believe this PLA process is an excellent innovation. Even if I had only received credit for the PLA5000 course, it would have been worth it. As it is, I have received 3 PLA credits and 4 transfer credits and have been assisted in planning my studies to complete the diploma. PLA put me in touch with key persons in the college who assisted me in individualizing my studies and timetable to enable completion. Before PLA5000, finishing the diploma seemed very remote."

– Barbara, Algonquin College

PLA Policy Development Across the College System

The PLA Group is responsible for providing the Minister of Education and Training with advice on the development of system-wide PLA policies. In reference to this role, the PLA Secretariat prepared a statement of the PLA Group's mandate and a comprehensive policy-development strategy, which emphasized consultation and the application of a set of PLA implementation principles (see pages 7-8). In addition, the PLA Group established rules of operation that reflect its intention to:

- stage PLA implementation activities over three years, with a view to achieving full implementation by September 1996;
- operate in an open and consultative manner;
- make decisions and recommendations on the basis of consensus, to the extent possible;
- establish appropriate links with communities/constituencies whose interests the PLA Group represents;
- assist colleges to carry out the implementation decisions made by the Minister.

The Strategy for PLA Policy Development

The policy-development strategy was designed to take into account the extant status of local PLA policies across the province; the differing visions and approaches to PLA among colleges; and the varied levels of PLA awareness and involvement by stakeholders – that is, college faculty and staff; trade, labour, and professional associations; potential learners; students' associations; community organizations; employers; universities; and other government ministries.

The Objectives of the Strategy

The strategy has as its objectives:

- ensuring that policy-development responsibilities are divided appropriately between the PLA Group/Minister and the colleges;

- ensuring that province-wide and local policies and practices are consistent with the accepted principles of PLA and result in college PLA activities that are:
  - accessible,
  - equitable,
  - open in process,
  - procedurally fair,
  - of the highest quality,
  - consistent,
  - accountable,
  - effective;
- eliciting strong stakeholder support for PLA policies.

The Features of the Strategy

The policy-development strategy has the following features:

- It integrates the full range of policy considerations, from adherence to the principles upon which policies should be based to the evaluation and revision of established policies.
- It incorporates a coordinated approach to related policy issues.
- It takes into account the impact that other initiatives have on PLA.
- It facilitates the identification of those policy issues that have priority and the development of resolutions to those issues.
- It promotes understanding of and clarifies the PLA issues and process.
- It facilitates the viable implementation of PLA.
- It balances consistency and flexibility in approach.
- It ensures that identified issues will be followed through.

The Policy-Development Process

The policy development process is a series of research and analysis activities which result in the presentation of policy options and recommendations to the PLA Group. For each policy issue, an action plan is devised to address the primary objectives of potential system-wide policy and to conduct research on current college practices, related policy issues, stakeholders' views, costs, related initiatives, and factors related to the external environment (e.g., occupational entry). Subsequently, relevant sub-issues and their potential impact are analysed, and appropriate policy options are developed. The consequences of each option are explored, and, where necessary, remedies are developed. Then, implementation timelines are established. These complete policy options are reviewed by the PLA Group and the Ontario Council of Regents, who

then forward their recommendations to the Minister. Once the Minister has made a decision to adopt a policy, notification is sent to college presidents. The next stage of the process involves the incorporation, monitoring, and evaluation of the new policy by the PLA Secretariat.

PLA Policy Issues

Identification of major policy issues was among the first tasks undertaken by the PLA Group. The system-wide policy issues identified as most pressing for 1993/94 included establishing key PLA definitions, preparation of challenge processes, transcription of credits, funding for colleges for 1993/94 and 1994/95, and the eligibility of PLA candidates for the Ontario Student Assistance Plan (OSAP).

On the basis of staff consultations conducted in 1992/93, the PLA Group compiled and prioritized a list of relevant policy issues. Throughout 1993/94, the list was reviewed and modified, as necessary.

The following policy issues were addressed by the PLA Group during 1993/94:

1. PLA coordination and the mandate of the PLA Group
2. PLA implementation principles
3. Conflict of interest in PLA Group membership
4. University representation on the PLA Group
5. Transcription of credits
6. Linkages between transfer of credit and PLA
7. Key PLA definitions
8. College preparation of challenge processes
9. Funding for colleges for 1993/94 and 1994/95
10. Eligibility of PLA candidates for OSAP

The PLA Group scheduled the following items for policy analysis by the end of 1994/95:

1. Residency and advanced standing
2. Eligibility for PLA
3. PLA appeals
4. Advanced program placements for PLA candidates
5. Exceptions to residency requirements

"I entered the portfolio development course as a fore runner to the Business Administration program. Beginning what appeared to be a time consuming and onerous task, I started gathering information and formulating my thoughts. Before long, I was caught up in the process and enjoying the research. "Searching back in my personal and professional history, I found myself gaining an insight to my style and a confidence in my abilities. An awareness of accomplishments was acquired and a sense of pride developed. I may have been laid off from my job but I could review my work and see that I had made an impression in that workplace and in others. I would leave with the knowledge that I had been a skilled and effective member of the management team.
"The course made me examine my past and my future. In asking for the identification of goals, it helped me to formulate a direction for the next several years. I feel comfortable with the goals that I have identified and I anticipate success in attaining these.
"I would highly recommend this [PLA] program to other displaced workers and I thank you for providing this program in your curriculum."

– Patti, Sir Sandford Fleming College

6. Review of the current funding structure, use of the ministry funding mechanism, and student assessment fees

7. Renewal of the PLA Facilitation Grant for 1995/96

8. PLA orientation for learners

9. Application of PLA to the Ontario Management Development Program

10. Extension of PLA to ministry-funded courses that are not part of an approved program

11. Implications of PLA for the new French-language colleges

12. Research Project No. 1: Language and Portfolio Development

13. Research Project No. 2: Foreign Credential Evaluation

Policy Issues Addressed in 1993/94

In addition to the mandate statement and the implementation principles discussed above, the following action was taken in respect to each of the remaining policy issues addressed in 1993/94.

Conflict of Interest in PLA Group Membership

The PLA Secretariat undertook to investigate the establishment of conflict-of-interest guidelines to protect the public and the PLA Group members, most of whom are accountable to external stakeholder groups. Once the research was completed and the options had been considered, the PLA Group unanimously agreed to adopt formal conflict-of-interest guidelines.

University Representation on the PLA Group

Early in its deliberations, the PLA Group identified university representation as a desirable addition to the range of perspectives provided by the group's members. In particular, it was noted that the extent to which universities respond positively to PLA will affect opportunities for successful college PLA learners to transfer to university programs. Agreement was reached to contact the Council of Ontario Universities to seek a nomination for a university liaison representative to join the PLA Group in fall 1994.

Transcription of Credits

This issue was of concern to all PLA stakeholders. Extensive research, analysis, and consultation with the colleges; trade, labour, and professional associations; and employers led to a recommendation being made to the Minister that a two-year interim transcription policy be adopted, starting in 1994/95, whereby credits earned through participation in PLA are recognized, as far as is practicable, in parallel with credits earned through course enrolment. The Minister accepted this recommendation (see Appendix 1).

Linkages Between Transfer of Credits and PLA

These two processes were viewed as requiring classification to maintain the distinctiveness of each, and as needing coordinating. The definition of "prior learning assessment" adopted by the Minister (see Appendix 1) states clearly that PLA involves the assessment of learning that is not recognized through the mechanisms for the formal transfer of credits. These mechanisms are administrative processes currently in place at Ontario's colleges whereby learners' transcripts are reviewed with the objective of granting credit or exemption for learning acquired at those institutions formally recognized by the colleges as educational. For example, credits awarded on transcripts from universities, other community colleges, and recognized educational institutions in other jurisdictions are accepted by the colleges. Colleges are appropriately sequencing their credit transfers and PLA procedures so that the latter are not applied to credits that are achievable through the credit-transfer process.

Key PLA Definitions

The PLA Group formulated definitions for "prior learning assessment", "challenge process", and "eligible for challenge" (see Appendix 1) after undertaking research and consultation on a system-wide basis. These definitions were approved by the Minister in June 1994. They foster consistency in implementation of PLA in colleges.

College Preparation of Challenge Processes

This issue was the foundation of a major implementation activity in 1993/94. The ministry's original goal of 50 per cent preparation by September 1994 was reviewed and revised, based on input from the colleges. A detailed discussion of the preparation of challenge processes appears below (see pages 30-31).

Funding for Colleges for 1993/94 and 1994/95

In the Minister's letter to the Council of Regents requesting the establishment of the PLA Advisory and Coordinating Group (see Apppendix 2), he stated that a total of $1.5 million would be made available for the PLA initiative in 1993/94. (The College Standards and Accreditation Council received $1.4 million, and other funding went to the Task Force on Advanced Learning.) Of this total, $480 000 was to be used to support the work of the PLA Group, including the PLA Secretariat and centrally delivered or supported training, and the remaining $1 020 000 was to be used as transfer payments to the colleges to support the introduction of PLA and to fund pilot projects. These funds came from the $3-million annual allocation set aside by the government in its 1991 Budget for initiatives stemming from the *Vision 2000* report.

If PLA was eventually to become an integral part of the academic process at the colleges, it was strongly felt that PLA should also be recognized in

G ord approached the PLA office on August 15 and hoped to begin full-time study in the second year of the program beginning September. Gord began to compile a portfolio of his learning from the field in order to request credit for the entire first year of the Broadcast Journalism program. Several faculty were involved in assessing Gord's learning and he was successful in gaining entry into the second year of the program, starting only one week late. Gord has made the transition to full-time study, and is doing extremely well in the program.

– Related by R. Burke for Gord, Mohawk College

the ministry's tuition-fee policy and in the colleges' general-purpose operating grants distribution formula. The Council of Regents, in consultation with the College Funding Review Committee, made recommendations to the Minister in March 1993 regarding student assessment fees, recognition of PLA activities in the funding formula, and allocation of a special grant to support colleges in the creation of the new position of PLA facilitator.

The initial funding recommendations were approved by the Minister, and all college presidents were notified in April 1993 of the PLA funding structure for 1993/94:

1. Portfolio development courses would be funded through the existing funding mechanism on a par with other part-time courses. Tuition fees would be determined according to existing guidelines.

2. Assessments of portfolios and challenge evaluations would be funded through the existing funding mechanism, using a transformation factor to convert assessments into funding units. For 1993/94, 100 assessments or challenges were deemed to be equivalent to 1 funding unit. The student fee for each PLA assessment was set at $50, a figure representing half the fee normally charged for enrolment in a part-time course lasting forty-five hours and, based on PLA Secretariat projections, half the total cost of the assessment. This new policy was included in *Tuition Fee Memorandum*, issued annually by the ministry. As well, the ministry's annually released *Guidelines for Reporting Enrolment for Funding Purposes* began to include references to PLA-related activities.

3. To assist in releasing one college staff member to be a PLA facilitator, the PLA Facilitation Grant was established. Funding was based on the PLA Secretariat's evaluation of the level of activities related to PLA implementation engaged in by a college.

The PLA Facilitation Grant

Two levels of funding for PLA facilitation were provided in 1993/94. Twelve colleges having demonstrated to the Council of Regents higher levels of PLA activity were granted $40 000 for a PLA facilitator. This amount represented approximately 80 per cent of the replacement cost of a faculty member. Assuming that the PLA facilitator

would also teach two sections of the portfolio development course, the remaining 20 per cent of the workload would be funded through the regular funding mechanism. Other colleges, with lower PLA activity bases, received $25 000 as the replacement cost of a half-time PLA facilitator. This allocation was made in recognition of the fact that all colleges, regardless of the level of PLA activity they were engaged in at that time, would have to implement the initiative. In winter 1994, those colleges that had received the lower allocation but had increased their levels of PLA activities prior to January 1994 became eligible for a "top-up" amount of $7500 (to bring the funding to the replacement cost of a full-time PLA facilitator). All eleven colleges in this category received the additional funding. The PLA Secretariat's funding recommendations to Council and to the Minister were based on analysis, according to established criteria, of progress reports submitted by the colleges, outlining their local PLA activities. These criteria were maintained as the yardstick in determining the renewal of the PLA Facilitation Grant in 1994/95, and included the following:

- The local PLA committee is active and includes formal Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU) representation.
- The entire current allocation is being used for releasing staff to work specifically and directly on PLA facilitation and is documented.
- The PLA implementation plan is in place and in progress.
- A portfolio development course is offered.
- PLA policies and procedures are in place.
- Key staff involved in PLA implementation have received appropriate PLA training.
- Efforts to extend awareness of PLA throughout the college have been made.
- The reporting requirements set out by the PLA Group are being met.
- A clearly designated contact to supply PLA information has been established.
- In bilingual colleges, the allocation is distributed between English- and French-language PLA services proportionate to need.

Bilingual Colleges Transition Project

A special project to help in the development of strategies for the implementation of PLA in the new French-language colleges in northern and central/southwestern Ontario was awarded $40 000. The project coordinated the development of PLA services among bilingual and French-language colleges to ensure: (a) that PLA services, which would have to be integrated once they were transferred to the new colleges, were developed collaboratively and in consultation, rather than in isolation; and (b) that PLA was incorporated into the services offered at the new French-language colleges as early as possible.

The project hired a coordinator, based at Cambrian College, who worked with the institutions involved, transferring PLA planning, training, and development activities and ensuring that attention to and awareness of PLA were not lost in the complexities of opening the new colleges. The project was relevant and had impact for the French-language network of colleges on the whole.

Funding Review

In his "Open Letter to the College System", the Minister stated that "as data are gathered throughout the three-year implementation phase of PLA, the assessment conversion factor and related fees will be reviewed". This review of the funding for PLA activities was not undertaken in 1993/94 as the available data for such a review were inadequate. It is expected that this review will be undertaken in 1994/95.

Eligibility of PLA Candidates for OSAP

In winter 1994, an OSAP/PLA Working Group[7] was formed to examine the possibility of making PLA candidates eligible for OSAP. The working group explored the issues and recommended changes be made to the OSAP regulations that would accommodate PLA candidates. The ministry accepted the recommendations, and college financial aid administrators and PLA facilitators were informed of the two new rules in August 1994:

1. PLA fees incurred within one year prior to enrolment in an approved postsecondary program may be included as a tuition cost for OSAP purposes. Proof of payment is required.

2. Part-time students facing difficulties in paying the cost of PLA assessments may apply for immediate assistance through the Ontario Special Bursary Program.

Challenge Development

In the Minister's "Open Letter" announcing the PLA initiative, he referred to a goal of 50 per cent of all courses to be made eligible for challenge by September 1994. The research and consultation subsequently conducted by the PLA Secretariat indicated that, in order to ensure that a qualitative approach was taken to challenge evaluations, considerable course preparation was required. During the consultations, several respondents suggested that, as an alternative to the September 1994 goal of 50 per cent, colleges should develop expanded work plans for preparing all courses to be "eligible for challenge"; the completion dates for these plans would extend beyond September 1994 but fall within the three-year implementation period. As well, colleges expressed willingness to be accountable for their challenge-preparation activities.

In January 1994, the PLA Group requested challenge work plans from all colleges. These were reviewed in detail by the PLA Group and found to be acceptable in that they demonstrated commitment and diligence in seeking to implement challenge processes of the highest quality. Several colleges noted, however, that a number of unresolved issues – for example, staff workloads and training in the area of learning outcomes – would affect their ability to implement their work plans successfully.

The PLA Group recognized that current financial pressures, restructuring activities, and other ministry-mandated initiatives would have an impact on colleges' capacities to achieve the goals outlined in their work plans. The PLA Group supported the work plans but advised the Minister of concern for the future of PLA in light of the limited financial support allocated to the initiative. In order to assess this situation more thoroughly, the PLA Group asked its secretariat to examine the full costs of PLA implementation during fiscal year (April 1 through March 31) 1994/95.

In April 1994, the PLA Group recommended to the Minister, through the Council of Regents, that colleges be allowed additional flexibility in the timing of their challenge activities and that they should be scheduled for completion by the end of the three-year PLA implementation period (June 1996). At the same time, the PLA Secretariat was asked to work with colleges to obtain whatever information was required to complete the challenge plans and to assist, where possible, in the further development and implementation of the work plans.

The PLA Group also accepted the representations of ministry staff that the focus of challenge development in 1994/95 should be on courses that are part of ministry-approved programs (excluding apprenticeship and the Ontario Management Development Program). The implications of this decision were identified for monitoring and review by the PLA Group for 1995/96.

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7. A list of OSAP Working Group members is provided in Appendix 7.

Colleges set various goals for having courses prepared for challenge by September 1994 (see Appendix 6, and Figure 6). Most goals were below the previously cited 50 per cent; several maintained the 50 per cent goal; and one college aspired to have all, rather than half, of its courses eligible for challenge by the stipulated date.

Learning Outcomes

The concept of course learning outcomes gained prominence with the adoption of the formal definitions of "challenge process" and "eligible for challenge" (see Appendix 1); the latter includes among its requirements that courses have appropriate learning outcomes.

According to this definition, learning outcomes are what the learner should know and be able to do in order to obtain credit for a course. Learning outcomes are further classified as essential, optional, or desirable; however, their most important distinguishing feature is that they represent the demonstration of learning.

The development of learning outcomes for college programs is a component of the CSAC initiative. In January 1994, the CSAC published its *Guidelines to the Development of Standards of Achievement Through Learning Outcomes*; in that document, it was made clear that the development of learning outcomes for college courses is the responsibility of each college. The PLA Group considered the

implications this document has for PLA's "eligible for challenge" requirements and inferred that, given the current state of PLA development, the application of learning outcomes at the course level may not be the appropriate approach to making courses eligible for challenge.

Colleges were using various approaches to course design and the specification of expected learning. "Expected learning" is also referred to as "performance objectives" and "competencies" but uniformly refers to what learners should know and be able to do to receive credit for a course. The PLA Group took the view that, at this stage of PLA development, these terms should be accepted as "learning outcomes" and as meeting the criteria of "eligible for challenge".

In sum, the PLA Group accepted the broad meaning of "learning outcomes" in order to accommodate the variety of curriculum approaches across the college system. According to this meaning, as long as courses have "learning outcomes" or other statements of "expected learning" that specify what learners should know and be able to do to complete a course successfully, and thus assist learners to make appropriate decisions about attempting an assessment process, those courses meet the definition of "eligible for challenge".

Figure 6: Challenge Development Targets for September 1994
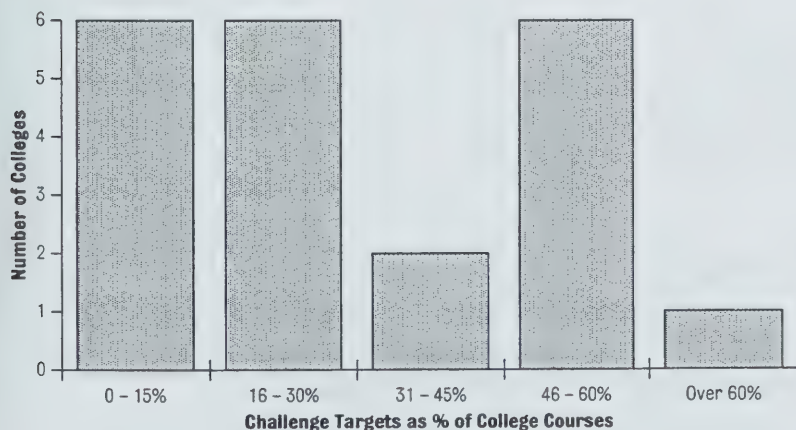
Note: Two colleges expressed their September 1994 targets as a number of courses.

Monitoring

The PLA Group recognizes the importance of maintaining its access to information on colleges' PLA implementation activities in order to prepare suitable recommendations for the Minister. Such linkages with the actual PLA undertakings of Ontario's colleges are instrumental in preparing for the comprehensive evaluation of PLA system-wide at the end of the third implementation year. In addition, access to college information enables the ministry to account for the public resources invested in the PLA initiative.

The PLA Group views its responsibility in the area of monitoring as consisting of information gathering and reporting. The consideration of what information should be sought and what collection methods should be used led to the identification of data items within each aspect of the PLA Group's mandate: policies, finances, training, promotion, and assessment. Information is collected for the purpose of measuring the effectiveness of PLA implementation in terms of its stated goals and to be used as a basis for recommended changes leading to the greater success of PLA implementation.

Monitoring Activities During 1993/94

One of the first monitoring tasks undertaken by the PLA Secretariat was to meet with ministry staff to discuss the inclusion of PLA activities among those areas for which the ministry had developed data-gathering mechanisms. Consequently, beginning in November 1993, the ministry's *Guidelines for Reporting Enrolment for Funding Purposes* included data on portfolio development courses and challenge and portfolio assessments.

"The portfolio development renewed my enthusiasm in myself and my job."

– Brian, Sault College

While systematic sustainable methods for monitoring PLA were being investigated, activities were being tracked by means of surveys, consultations, and dialogue with the colleges. Each staff member of the PLA Secretariat was assigned particular colleges with which to liaise. Information gathered from colleges' reporting formed the basis for the PLA funding strategy recommended to the Minister.

Concern that a more permanent tracking mechanism was required for PLA activities across the system led to a pilot project, with Canadore College as leader, to develop an information system to support the implementation of PLA (see pages 23-24 for more information on this pilot project). The PLA Group provided the project with a framework for the system, stipulating that it be based on the following principles:

- The PLA information system should foster the promotion of improved access to Ontario's colleges – one of the ministry's primary goals.

- Data collected should address the information needs of both the ministry and the individual college.

- Full participation in the information system should not be burdensome for the colleges.

- The system should be developed in partnership with the colleges.

- After the initial development stage, the system should be able to be managed with existing resources.

- The information gathered should be shared with the public, as required.

- Where data gathered are personal, adequate provision should be made to maintain confidentiality and restrict access, as appropriate.

Several times during 1993/94, the PLA Secretariat developed an overall scheme for PLA implementation based on information provided by the colleges in survey reports. Surveys related to the status of PLA implementation were conducted in March 1993, September 1993, and June 1994. In the June 1994 survey, colleges responding indicated significant increases in their PLA activities. These findings are discussed further under "PLA Activities at Colleges" above (see pages 10-15).

Training

The Strategy for PLA Training

The central development of PLA training preceded the three-year phase of PLA implementation that began in September 1993. Anticipating a positive response from the government to the PLA Advisory Committee's final report of July 1992, the Council of Regents established an ad hoc PLA Pre-implementation Committee (see Appendix 3), which completed its work and disbanded in March 1993. The committee had two working groups, one of which assisted the PLA Secretariat to plan and develop training. The PLA Pre-implementation Committee formulated the mission statement for the PLA training program: "to meet the learning needs of all persons participating in the design and delivery of PLA and to develop sound, consistent, system-wide practices of prior learning assessment".

The committee saw sound, consistent training for portfolio and other comprehensive PLA methods as pivotal in determining the success or failure of the PLA initiative. The need to ensure that such training provided the necessary skills for PLA practitioners, leading to consistent and equitable treatment of PLA learners, was deemed equally important.

At the outset, a centralized training effort, drawing on the training resources and experienced practitioners within the system and from other jurisdictions, was seen as a way to ensure that the training was of consistently high quality and was applicable across the college system. In this way, growth in awareness of PLA and in the number of practitioners could be stimulated and supported.

A major focus of the PLA training strategy, then, was on faculty and on making training available as soon as possible to facilitate the implementation of PLA throughout the system. The committee felt that faculty participation and interest was an integral part of PLA implementation. None the less, program managers, coordinators, chairs, counsellors,

registrars, and others were also to have access to training to provide guidance in relation to the assessment of prior learning.

The committee proposed six goals for the PLA Training Program. Consistent with the stated commitment of Ontario's college system to "meet the relevant needs of all adults within a community at all socio-economic levels, of all kinds of interests and aptitudes, and at all stages of educational achievement",[8] the PLA Training Program would seek to ensure that

- PLA practitioners have the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed for effective participation in the assessment of prior learning;
- non-PLA practitioners (within and external to colleges) are aware of the principles, practices, and usefulness of the assessment of prior learning;
- adult learners are treated with respect and dignity for their learning derived from previous college and non-college activities;
- adult learners have a responsible and realistic self-image in relation to their past experiences;
- adult learners exhibit confidence in their ability to acquire and apply knowledge and skills gained from a variety of formal and informal settings;
- available resources and training opportunities within and outside the college system are utilized in delivering the PLA Training Program.

The Development of PLA Training Sessions

With the assistance of the PLA Pre-implementation Committee, the PLA Secretariat began to develop a series of training sessions[9] for use in various PLA training programs. The sessions examined the important basic knowledge, skills, and resources needed to promote good practices in assessing prior learning. The training material was targeted for anyone involved in the design or delivery of PLA and for PLA trainers presenting the theories and applications of PLA to college personnel.

8. PLA Training Conference brochure, Council of Regents, May 1993.

9. These training sessions are described in Appendix 8.

"I was able to complete the portfolio course, get credit for it and two other program courses, graduate in the spring and get a job as a counsellor in my field a year earlier because I finally had the piece of paper [diploma]."

– Karen, Sault College

In order that the program be suitable for its various audiences, it was decided that its design should be comprehensive, structured, portable, adaptable, continuous, target group–focused, test-proven, and accommodating of different levels of learning. Whereas program workshops were to be made available to college personnel who wished to explore specific areas of PLA and were not to be compulsory, participation in appropriate training sessions was to be a requirement for PLA facilitators and assessors.

The PLA Training Program was organized in three levels, with eleven short workshop-format sessions. Each session focused on a particular set of skills and typically included a discussion of the theme or focus, the target audience, the prerequisites, the specific learning objectives, the available resources, and the goal-related procedures and activities (see Appendix 8).

Level One sessions were designed for persons with little or no knowledge of prior learning assessment and were suitable both for those who were curious about PLA and for potential practitioners. These introductory sessions provide orientation to the PLA process and promote understanding of PLA in the context of the adult learner. Three sessions are offered at this level: "Introduction to Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)", "Local and Central Policies for PLA", and "The Extension of the Principles of Adult Learning to PLA".

Level Two sessions were designed for those working towards becoming PLA practitioners. These sessions provide in-depth reviews of the various issues and principles associated with good practice in this aspect of adult education and introduce the notion of change in their organization. The six sessions offered at this level were developed by the PLA Secretariat and the PLA Pre-implementation Committee: "Learning Contracts and Independent Study in PLA", "Career and Educational Planning for PLA Candidates", "Ethical Issues in PLA", "Overcoming Barriers in Accessing PLA", "The Role of Active Listening in PLA", and "Marketing PLA".

Level Three sessions were designed for those who are familiar with PLA processes and may already be involved with some aspect of PLA in a college environment and who wish to develop their skills in PLA application. Three sessions are offered at this level: "Conducting a PLA Orientation Session", "PLA and Ontario's Culturally Diverse Population", and "Giving Feedback to the PLA Candidate".

Training for PLA Practice

The first in a series of hands-on training programs based on the training sessions took place in May 1993, in Toronto. The Deputy Minister of Education and Training, Charles Pascal, and the Chair of the PLA Advisory and Coordinating Group, Wesley Romulus, opened the event, setting the context for PLA development and practice. This week-long training conference was attended by 104 college faculty and administrators, and the sessions were delivered primarily by college staff. It was expected that many of the participants would, in future, become PLA trainers at their colleges. A similar conference was held in Ottawa, in June 1993, for francophone college staff.

In fall 1993, regional training events – four English and two French – were organized, targeted at those who had attended the training conferences in May and June 1993. The purpose of these events was to provide "train the trainer" workshops for those PLA practitioners who would go on to conduct local training at their colleges. College staff also delivered these events, which focused on the assessment of portfolios and challenge processes.

Subsequent to the 1993 training conferences, several colleges planned and conducted local training sessions for their faculty and other college staff. Some colleges have also begun awareness training with business and community organizations. The PLA Secretariat assists in those efforts when requested to.

Major Issues Associated with PLA Implementation

In 1993/94, as colleges intensified their PLA implementation efforts, they identified areas in which difficulties had arisen or were imminent. These issues were given consideration by the PLA Group and, where it had jurisdiction and available resources, it dealt with them.

Faculty Workload

The provincial collective agreement for academic employees in the colleges does not make reference to PLA activities since it was signed prior to the beginning of system-wide PLA implementation. As a result of the Social Contract Act, the agreement has been extended without modification through to September 1996.

Important PLA activities, including preparing challenges and assessing portfolios, involve work by college faculty. In the early stages of PLA implementation, forecasting the courses for which PLA will be requested and the number of such requests is difficult and, since faculty workloads are determined in advance of the start of a semester, accommodating PLA activities is problematic.

Prior to system-wide PLA implementation, colleges offering PLA compensated faculty members for their involvement in PLA activities on a flat-rate or hourly basis as part-time staff not covered by the provisions of the collective agreement. If PLA is to become a mainstream college activity, the work associated with it will have to be recognized as part of the regular duties of full-time college staff.

In May 1994, the Employee/Employer Relations Committee (EERC) for academic staff – the committee established by the collective agreement to act as liaison during non-bargaining periods – examined the issue of PLA workload. The EERC asked colleges to report on the methods of staff compensation they adopted for a one-year period ending in May 1995 and suggested they use the Standard Workload Form (SWF) for PLA activities as much as possible.

The issue of faculty workload and PLA will be re-examined by the EERC in spring 1995 in light of colleges' experiences with it in 1994/95.

Enrolment in Portfolio Development Courses

Enrolments in portfolio development courses have been low in 1993/94. Factors contributing to this problem include outreach efforts, course length, course title, and course location and delivery modes. In addition, it has become clear that the constraints surrounding the sponsorship of UIC and other social-assistance recipients have a negative impact on participation in portfolio development courses. Such sponsorship is often based on criteria that typically include course-duration and attendance factors.

It will be of benefit to colleges seeking to increase participation in their portfolio development courses to consult a profile of those learners who have accessed such courses in the past. Such a profile is not yet available and its development will depend on the existence of a mechanism for tracking learners through PLA.

Assessment Methodology

PLA assessment methodology has been applied almost exclusively on a course-by-course (per-course) basis, paralleling the colleges' approach to curriculum delivery. However, this structuring has proved problematic for both colleges and learners.

In a per-course approach to assessment, a learner who wishes to undertake several assessments must invest considerable money and time in doing so. Each assessment costs $50 and may take two hours; thus, multiple assessments can be costly and time-intensive for the learner. This approach is also demanding for the college as it is labour-intensive and may become difficult to coordinate.

Colleges have been considering alternative approaches, including block assessment, which applies to a program semester or year rather than a single course.

The mandated feasibility study, scheduled to commence in 1994/95, of including the evaluation of non-college programs as a PLA method may

provide another alternative to per-course assessment. In this evaluation the academic and administrative components of non-college programs are examined to determine whether learners who have successfully completed them can receive college PLA credits without further assessment. A positive determination will simplify the problem of PLA assessment only for those learners who have completed non-college programs; thus, other alternative assessment approaches need to be developed.

PLA Funding and Fee Structure

Review of the PLA funding and fee structure is scheduled to be undertaken in 1994/95. The current structure was put in place in April 1993 and includes the subsuming of PLA assessment funding within the colleges' general-purpose operating grants distribution formula, with a conversion factor of 100 assessments per funding unit. PLA assessment fees of $50 per course, for challenge evaluation or portfolio assessment, are also charged (subject to yearly increase).

The funding review will examine whether the PLA funding structure and the assessment fees are appropriate, from the point of view of both colleges and learners.

In anticipation of a future position as Project Manager, SPS-CP-03 within RCMP Informatics, Mike is anxious to complete his Microcomputer Support Specialist Certificate. He is hoping to receive 6 PLA credits through a combination of his portfolio assessment and challenge tests. His assessment is presently in progress.

Mike has thoroughly enjoyed the reflection and planning aspects of the PLA5000 course and is proud of his portfolio – which he readily shares with others as an excellent example. He considers that the close personal advising, the recognition and support of his extensive learning and the motivation he received from other peers in the PLA course as long lasting benefits. He is presently vigorously and enthusiastically marketing the PLA program with his working colleagues.

– Related by D. Shaughnessy for Mike, Algonquin College

Scope of Policy Issues

PLA policy development has, as was the case with the Standard Workload Form (SWF) and the Residency Requirement, included issues that are also relevant to the operation of the college system and, as such, are broader in scope than the PLA initiative alone. Since attempts to resolve such issues cannot be discrete, in seeking to fulfil its mandate, the PLA Group may find that the solutions it proposes conflict with policies of other mandated bodies and it may need greater leverage or expanded collaboration to achieve resolution. Among such issues on the PLA Group's policy roster are PLA appeals, the application of PLA to apprenticeship, and the advanced placement of PLA candidates.

Scope of PLA Training

Training is unanimously held to be the single most important undertaking in the development of PLA. The extent of training required and requested is enormous; many of those who have already received training are interested in more, while the numbers of those who have yet to undertake training, including external stakeholders, are significant. While efforts of both colleges and the PLA Group to accommodate those seeking PLA training are concerted, it is apparent that the resources available may not be adequate for the task.

Marketing Needs

In the current economic context of downsizing and restructuring, interest in PLA is expanding to large institutions such the military and corporations; thus, it seems that the demand for PLA services is likely to grow exponentially. However, colleges are not uniformly prepared to meet the growing numbers of requests for PLA, which has become an impediment to the marketing of the initiative on a province-wide basis. None the less, accountability for the public funds invested in PLA demands that serious interventions be undertaken to ensure that the maximum return on this investment is achieved. It is hoped that, in 1994/95, the PLA Group, in conjunction with the colleges, will be able to significantly enhance marketing efforts to expand the base of PLA across the province.

PLA Plans for the Coming Year

While the emphasis in 1993/94 was on the preparation of colleges for the implementation of PLA, 1994/95 will see new and continuing efforts to consolidate the PLA initiative and to expand the participation of external partners and stakeholders. Future priorities include the development of certain academic policies; the publication of training manuals and a faculty handbook for PLA; assistance for local, regional, and other PLA training programs; development of new PLA projects; facilitating the implementation of PLA by the new French-language colleges; and increasing PLA training and awareness among external stakeholders.

In 1994/95, the PLA Group will commence its study of the evaluation of foreign credentials. The PLA Secretariat will consult with various government ministries, college organizations, and occupational associations in amassing research for this study. Analysis of the gathered data and the formulation of policy recommendations should be completed by June 1995.

In the coming year, the PLA Group also plans to make recommendations to the Minister relating to the accommodation in portfolio development of those whose first language is neither English nor

David was the first of our PLA students to graduate. He received his diploma in Journalism in June 1994. David had extensive experiential learning acquired through employment as an editor, freelance writer, reporter and photographer from 1972 - 1993. David received 7 course credits through a combination of product assessments, portfolio and demonstrations. Subsequent to his successful completion of his studies, David has been hired full-time as an editor at the Ottawa Citizen and as a part-time teacher in the Journalism program at Algonquin College.

– Related by D. Shaugnessy for David, Algonquin College

French. The findings of three PLA pilot projects that addressed various aspects of this issue (see pages 19 and 22-23) will be incorporated in formulating a comprehensive recommendation, as requested by the Minister.

Previously there were few data to support the review of PLA funding and fees. However, in the coming year, adequate information for the conducting of such a review is expected to be available. The PLA Secretariat will work with various committees concerned with college-funding issues to complete this review.

One important way in which links with external stakeholders are maintained is through their membership in the PLA Group. In 1994/95, the group expects to expand its member base to include representatives from the university sector as well as Aboriginal representation from within the college system. These members will bring forward the concerns and perspectives of their constituencies and will facilitate wider sharing of PLA information.

The three phases of PLA pilot projects have provided valuable insights into the implementation of PLA in the college system. Although colleges applied for project grants based on their own PLA-development needs, the project results have had applications beyond the college system in Ontario and have been used to great advantage in other provinces.

The need for new pilot projects is ongoing. For example, the colleges are still exploring ways to accelerate the development of challenge processes and to reduce costs. The identification of new ways of making portfolio development courses, and assessment of prior learning in general, more attractive to learners is a subject for further study in 1994/95.

The prior activities of Loyalist College and First Nations Technical Institute in incorporating PLA in their Human Services programs, and First Nations Technical Institute's annual PLA conference, have contributed to expanding awareness of PLA among Aboriginal communities. However, further efforts to expand that awareness are needed; specifically, Aboriginal learners need general information about the assessment of prior learning

and information about PLA processes related to their culture. The PLA Group will examine how college PLA activities can be tailored to meet the needs of Aboriginal learners.

The PLA Group, in collaboration with the colleges, will establish a strategy for increasing general awareness of PLA among external stakeholders, thereby increasing the support and demand for PLA. The strategy will also involve providing opportunities for external partners to participate in the various levels of the PLA process.

The PLA Secretariat will participate in developing and coordinating the National Forum on Prior Learning Assessment, to be held on October 23-25, 1995, in Ottawa. Human Resources Development Canada is sponsoring the forum, and Ontario is expected to play a major role, sharing its experiences with PLA over the last three years.

In sum, the PLA Group looks forward to a year of challenges and rewards in developing the PLA initiative in Ontario's colleges.

Appendix 1: Requirements in Making Courses Eligible for Challenge and Definitions of "Prior Learning Assessment", "Challenge Process", and "Eligible for Challenge"

Ministry of Education and Training	Ministère de l'Éducation et de la Formation	Mowat Block Queen's Park Toronto, Ontario M7A 1L2 Telephone (416)325-2600 Facsimile (416) 325-2608	Édifice Mowat Queen's Park Toronto (Ontario) M7A 1L2 Téléphone (416) 325-2600 Télécolpieur (416) 325-2608

Minister   Ministre

June 13, 1994

MEMORANDUM TO: Presidents
                                           Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology

SUBJECT: Implementation of Prior Learning Assessment Challenge
                                           Processes in Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology

I recently received several recommendations from the Council of Regents and the Prior Learning Assessment Advisory and Coordinating Group (PLA Group) on matters relating to system-wide implementation of prior learning assessment challenge processes at Ontario's colleges.

I have reviewed the PLA Group's recommendations on preparing courses for challenge through the implementation of college workplans over the three-year PLA implementation period. I am advised that the workplans submitted by colleges demonstrate commitment and diligence toward implementing high quality challenge processes. I have also been advised of colleges' concern that notwithstanding their best efforts, current financial pressures, restructuring activities and other initiatives may have an impact on colleges' capacities to fulfill the goals outlined in the workplans.

I accept the PLA Group's recommendations and therefore wish to advise you that additional flexibility will be given to colleges in the timing of their challenge workplan activities. However, colleges should continue to work toward making all courses that are part of Ministry-approved programs eligible for challenge by the end of the three-year PLA implementation period (June 1996).

I have also reviewed the attached definitions of "prior learning assessment", "challenge process" and "eligible for challenge" and agree that their adoption will help to maintain consistency in PLA implementation in Ontario's Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology. For your information, these definitions are accompanied by explanatory notes prepared by staff at the PLA Secretariat.

Therefore, for each course considered "eligible for challenge", colleges should make publicly available a form outlining the information the PLA candidates will need in order to make a decision about challenging the course. The form should include such information as the course's learning outcomes, criteria for success, indicators of the importance of the expected learning where applicable (weighting), possible or

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available assessment/evaluation methods and tools, and supports available to learners (e.g., sample tests, study guides, etc.).

I am asking that this September, colleges start listing all courses which are "eligible for challenge" in accordance with the definition. This listing should be provided to the PLA Group and made available to the public.

I have asked the PLA Group to report to me annually on progress made by the colleges in implementing PLA. The colleges' lists of courses that are challengeable, in combination with the colleges' workplans, will help them monitor system-wide progress. The PLA Secretariat at the Council of Regents will work with colleges to assist wherever possible in the further development and implementation of the workplans.

I would like to commend Ontario's colleges, the PLA Advisory and Coordinating Group, and all participants in the consultations and the work relating to preparation of PLA challenge processes for their interest, cooperation and diligence in addressing the above issues. I hope that this positive approach to system-wide policy development will continue and that the above decisions will assist colleges to provide high quality prior learning assessment services which are accessible, equitable and fair to all learners across Ontario.

For further information, please contact Louis Lizotte, PLA Coordinator at the Council of Regents, at (416) 325-1784.

Dave Cooke, Minister
M.P.P., Windsor-Riverside

c.c. PLA contacts

DEFINITION OF "PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT"

Prior learning assessment (PLA) is a process which uses a variety of tools to help learners reflect on, identify, articulate and demonstrate past learning which has been acquired through study, work and other life experiences and which is not recognized through formal transfer of credit mechanisms. PLA allows the evaluation of past learning against established academic standards so that credit can be awarded by a credentialling body.

Current Application:
In Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology, the PLA system currently evaluates prior learning and relates it to existing courses through portfolio assessment and challenge evaluation, for the purpose of granting college credit.

Explanatory Note Re: Definition of Prior Learning Assessment

"Study" includes formal studies which have taken place at educational institutions in other jurisdictions but for which learners have no or insufficient documentation to verify the learning acquired. It also includes formal studies which have taken place in programs outside Ontario's educational institutions (e.g., workplace training programs).

"Formal transfer of credit mechanisms" refers to the administrative processes currently in place at Ontario's colleges through which a review of learners' transcripts results in the granting of credit or exemption for learning acquired at other institutions formally recognized by the college as educational institutions. This includes, for example, recognition of credits awarded on transcripts from universities, other community colleges and educational institutions in other jurisdictions to the extent that they are currently, formally recognized by the college.

Certificates of Qualifications in the regulated trades are not issued by educational institutions and are therefore not included in the meaning of transfer of credit. Acquired learning which leads an individual to qualify for a certificate of qualification can be appropriately credited through prior learning assessment.

"Credentialling body" refers to formal educational institutions and occupational accrediting bodies which are recognized by a college. These include, for example, secondary schools, colleges of applied arts and technology, CEGEPs, universities, and other provincially recognized providers of formal education such as the Michener Institute, FNTI, and a number of self-governing occupational bodies.

"Current Application" refers to the context in which prior learning assessment is currently being applied at Ontario's community colleges. Other prior learning assessment activities such as block assessments and evaluation of non-college programs for credit are not Ontario's focus at this time.

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DEFINITION OF "CHALLENGE PROCESS"

A challenge process is a method of assessment, other than portfolio, developed and evaluated by subject-expert faculty to measure an individual's learning achievements against course learning outcomes. It measures demonstrated learning through a variety of written and non-written evaluation methods, for the purpose of awarding credit without requiring enrolment in a course.

Explanatory Note Re: Definition of Challenge Process

"Subject-expert faculty" refers to a faculty member who is thoroughly familiar with the learning requirements and assessment methods and tools of a particular course and is in the best position to evaluate an individual's learning in relation to that course. Typically, it would be a faculty member who teaches or has taught the course at the college.

"Learning outcomes" describe what the learner should know and be able to do in order to be granted credit for a course. Some learning outcomes may be deemed essential; others may be optional or desirable. Content and contexts in which learning has been achieved is less important than the demonstration of its achievement.

The development of "learning outcomes" for college **programs** is a component of the CSAC initiative. (See CSAC's *Guidelines to the Development of Standards of Achievement through Learning Outcomes* – January 1994). The development of learning outcomes for college **courses** is the responsibility of colleges.

"Variety of written and non-written evaluation methods" refers to the range of evaluation tools and techniques that should be considered in developing evaluation activities for courses. They include but are not limited to essay writing, short answer tasks, journals, reports, articles, multiple choice, true/false, demonstrations, simulations, role plays, case studies, interviews, oral presentations, and product development.

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DEFINITION OF "ELIGIBLE FOR CHALLENGE"

Courses eligible for challenge are those for which clear statements of learning outcomes have been prepared; broad areas of content and their relative importance (where applicable) have been identified; criteria for success have been established; a range of assessment processes, tools, and supports have been identified, and can be made available to learners within a reasonable period of time.

Explanatory Note Re: Meaning of Eligible for Challenge

A course which is **"eligible for challenge"** is one in which the evaluation facilitates the recognition of all learning which meets expected learning outcomes for that particular course. The expected level of course preparation is articulated in the attached definition. It does not require the immediate availability of specific assessment tools, although this may be possible for some courses.

"Reasonable period of time" refers to the earliest possible opportunity at which appropriate challenges can be administered in a highly accessible, cost-effective manner. Every possible effort should be made not to jeopardize the academic progress of the learner. In some cases, challenge processes will be immediately available; in other cases additional time for scheduling or acquisition of necessary equipment or space may be required.

Setting reasonable time limits on requests for challenges would facilitate the delivery of this service.

"Supports" refers to written or non-written materials and resources which should be made available to learners to help them to judge their potential success in completing a challenge process, and to help them to prepare for challenges. Examples of appropriate supports are: texts, reference material, manuals, handbooks, course outlines, sample questions or products, previous tests, course analysis forms, and other relevant reading materials.

Appendix 2: Letter to the Chair, Council of Regents, from the Minister

February 26, 1993

Mr. Richard Johnston
Chair, Council of Regents
11th Floor
790 Bay Street
Toronto, Ontario
M5G 1N8

Dear Mr. Johnston:

On February 10, 1993, Cabinet gave final approval to the proposal to implement a comprehensive system of Prior Learning Assessment in Ontario's colleges of applied arts and technology. The Government has agreed that prior learning assessment (PLA) in the colleges is to be based upon the following framework:

- in the initial three-year phase, prior learning assessment will focus on the portfolio development and challenge processes;

- by September 1994, 50 percent of courses at each college should be eligible for challenge;

- candidates for prior learning assessment must have reached either 19 years of age or have earned an Ontario Secondary School Diploma;

- in the initial three-year phase, candidates for the portfolio development course will be required to meet the normal language requirements for their chosen course/program;

- there will be a 25 percent residency requirement;

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    -     college staff working as portfolio assessors,
          facilitators or portfolio development course
          instructors will receive appropriate training
          prior to their involvement in portfolio
          development and assessment.

Both the portfolio development and challenge processes
will be phased-in over the initial three-year period.
As the PLA initiative is implemented, it is critical
that Francophone students have access to these
opportunities.

My purpose in writing to you is to request that the
Council of Regents establish a Prior Learning
Assessment Advisory and Coordinating Group to guide the
implementation of prior learning assessment in the
initial three-year phase. The membership of the PLA
Group should be along the lines recommended in the
Final Report of the Advisory Committee on Prior
Learning Assessment. In addition, I am asking that a
Francophone sub-committee be established. When
establishing the PLA Group, care should be taken to
ensure that its membership reflects the diversity of
Ontario's population with attention paid to gender,
racial and cultural diversity, persons with special
needs, and Ontario's geographic regions. At least four
representatives of the Francophone community should be
included as voting members in the PLA Group.

The specific responsibilities of the PLA Advisory and
Coordinating Group will be the provision of policy and
funding advice relevant to prior learning assessment,
planning, and the coordination of PLA training and mar-
keting. The PLA Group will also be responsible for mon-
itoring and evaluating the colleges' experience with
prior learning assessment and providing me with an
annual report in this regard.

I am also asking the PLA Group to conduct further study
in a number of areas. Some of these areas were
identified by the Council of Regents' Advisory
Committee on Prior Learning Assessment; the others from

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part of the government's response to the report on Access to Professions and Trades. The areas of study are:

–   the costs and benefits of extending PLA practices to include the evaluation of selected non-college programs;

–   the issue of language competence and the portfolio process and the feasibility of developing approaches which for the purposes of PLA are not dependent upon English and French Language competence;

–   the long-term cost of implementing a systematic approach to the evaluation of foreign academic credentials for the purpose of assessing academic equivalency in the college system;

–   a process for developing upgrading and supplementary education programs for foreign trained individuals who need additional education or training to tender professions or trades.

A total of $1.5 million will be made available for the prior learning assessment initiative in fiscal 1993-94.

Of this amount, $480,000 will support the work of the PLA Advisory and Coordinating Group including training costs. The remaining $1,020,000 will be maintained in the college operating grants to support the introduction of PLA in the colleges and to fund pilot projects.

Before closing I would like to take this opportunity to thank you, your staff, and the members of the Advisory Committee on Prior Learning Assessment for the excellent work which went into the development of the Final Report. The system of prior learning assessment which will now be implemented is based largely on the report's recommendations. I would appreciate it if you could convey my thanks to your staff and the committee members.

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The implementation of prior learning assessment in the
college system is an exciting and important initiative.
I look forward to being kept apprised of the Council's
work as we move into the next phase.

Sincerely,

Dave Cooke
Minister
M.P.P., Windsor-Riverside

Appendix 3: PLA Pre-implementation Committee

This committee assisted the PLA Secretariat in analysing policy issues and preparing training for PLA, prior to the Minister's announcement of system-wide PLA implementation and the establishment of the PLA Advisory and Coordinating Group. After the committee disbanded in April 1993, many of its members continued to contribute to the development of PLA in various ways and settings.

Members:

Marilyn Black-Lambert
Conestoga College

Keren Braithwaite
University of Toronto

Roberta Burke
Mohawk College

Floreen Cleary
Georgian College

Ron Golemba
Centennial College, OPSEU

Don Groff
First Nations Technical Institute

Rae Gropper
Mitchener Institute

Carol Henry
Seneca College

Marti Jurmain
Niagara College

Maureen Kennedy Baker
Seneca College

Jane Kirkwood
Ministry of Colleges and Universities

Don Loraas
Lambton College

Maurice Perrier
Northern College

Jacqueline Robertson
La Cité collégiale

Diane Shaughnessy
Algonquin College

Alan Thomas
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education

Paul Zakos
Loyalist College and First Nations Technical
    Institute

Appendix 4: PLA Facilitators at Ontario Colleges, June 1994

College	PLA Facilitator
Algonquin College	Diane Shaughnessy
Cambrian College	Joanna Taylor (Eng.) Donald Pitre (Fr.)
Canadore College	Anne Bell
Centennial College	Betty McCulloch
La Cité collégiale	Jacqueline Robertson
Collège Boréal	Chantal Pollock
Le Collège des Grands Lacs	France Picard
Conestoga College	Eleanor Conlin
Confederation College	John Hatton
Durham College	Marylyn West-Moynes
Fanshawe College	Sandra Aarts
George Brown College	Amy Thornton
Georgian College	Mary O'Farrell-Bowers
Humber College	Pamela Mitchell
Lambton College	George Allen
Loyalist College	Paul Zakos Ray Michol
Mohawk College	Roberta Burke
Niagara College	Brian Keppy
Northern College	Joan Ludwig (Eng.) Maurice Perrier (Fr.)
Sault College	Sandi Mills
Seneca College	Barbara White
Sheridan College	Barbara Handler
Sir Sandford Fleming College	Bonnie Kennedy
St. Clair College	Pat Hallahan
St. Lawrence College	Judith Anne Woodcock

Appendix 5: The PLA Regional Networks

Eastern Region

Algonquin College
Durham College
Loyalist College
St. Lawrence College
Sir Sandford Fleming College

French-Language Network

La Cité collégiale
Collège Boréal
Collège des Grands Lacs
Collège Cambrian
Collège Northern

Northern Region

Cambrian College
Canadore College
Confederation College
Northern College
Sault College

Central Region

George Brown College
Georgian College
Centennial College
Sheridan College
Humber College
Seneca College

Western Region

Mohawk College
Conestoga College
Niagara College
Lambton College
St. Clair College

Appendix 6: Challenge Development Targets

The college work plans set the following
September 1994 goals for preparing courses
for challenge:

College	"Eligible for Challenge" Target for September 1994
Algonquin College	50%
Cambrian College	50%
Canadore College	50%
La Cité collégiale	15%
Conestoga College	25%
Confederation College	30%
Durham College	20%
George Brown College	50%
Georgian College	43%
Humber College	50%
Lambton College	15% (by June 1994)
Loyalist College	25%
Niagara College	50%
Northern College	35%
Sault College	15%
Seneca College	20%
Sir Sandford Fleming College	100%
St. Clair College	20%
Mohawk College	350 courses
St. Lawrence College	year 1 courses
Sheridan College	unquantified for Sept. 1994 (100% by 1995)
Centennial College	none specified
Fanshawe College	none specified

This table was compiled from information provided
by each college to the PLA Secretariat, in winter
or spring 1994.

Appendix 7: OSAP/PLA Working Group Members

Jane Kirkwood
Ministry of Education and Training/Student
Affairs Team

Laurie Leslie
Ministry of Education and Training/OSAP

Louis Lizotte
Ontario Council of Regents/PLA Secretariat

Pamela Mitchell
PLA Consultant
Humber College

Pat Scrase
Financial Aid Administrator
Humber College

Barb White
PLA Facilitator
Seneca College

Iris Williams
Financial Aid Administrator
Seneca College

Appendix 8: Descriptions of PLA Training Sessions

Level One

Introduction to Prior Learning Assessment (PLA): This introductory session offers basic awareness training, including descriptions of internationally accepted principles and practices of PLA. The objectives of this session are achieved when participants experience some degree of familiarity with the historical developments and concepts related to PLA.

Local and Central Policies for PLA: Participants in this session examine critical issues which a formalized system of PLA must address. It analyses how institutions providing PLA, including Ontario's colleges, have applied the principles and practices to fit their own needs and demographics.

The Extension of the Principles of Adult Learning to PLA: The role of the principles of adult learning in PLA is put into perspective in this session. Participants apply the principles of adult learning to the practice of PLA, especially as this practice relates to what obtains in the college classroom setting.

Level Two

Learning Contracts and Independent Study in PLA: This session examines how learning contracts and independent study may be used in assisting PLA learners who may need only to "top up" for a course or credit.

Career and Educational Planning for PLA Candidates: This career and educational planning session is ideal for teachers of the portfolio development course. However, since not all PLA students enrol in portfolio development courses, PLA teachers or staff counselling one-to-one or in small groups, outside the context of the portfolio course, will find this session useful. It focuses on strategies for assisting PLA candidates to develop action plans for career and educational achievement and prepares participants to function in a PLA-related counselling role.

Ethical Issues in PLA: A useful session for anyone practising PLA, in helping to evaluate appropriate conduct and clarify values in PLA practices. It also provides an opportunity for practitioners to explore the ethics involved in dealing with the personal and emotional experiences of learners. Small-group activities are included.

Overcoming Barriers to Accessing PLA: The institutional factors and the personal characteristics of those adults for whom PLA is to provide access are analysed. After examining the nature of barriers to accessing college training and credentials, participants develop strategies for minimizing such impediments and for enhancing access.

The Role of Active Listening in PLA: This session discusses the pedagogical benefits of active listening. It also explores the dynamics of interpersonal communications. The importance of listening within the PLA process is emphasized. This training session consists of a presentation followed by individual application.

Marketing PLA: This session can be used to sensitize PLA practitioners and administrators to the issues involved in directly or indirectly promoting PLA, in the colleges or the larger community. The trainer of this session may need to be prepared to deal with some negative attitudes towards PLA.

Level Three

Conducting a PLA Orientation Session: This session is appropriate for persons with an advanced understanding of PLA theories and processes. It will be most beneficial to persons directly involved in serving PLA applicants or conducting the PLA Orientation Sessions at their institutions. The trainer delivering this session will be very knowledgeable about the processes, practices, and procedures in PLA.

PLA and Ontario's Culturally Diverse Population: Participants in this session come into close encounter with issues which arise in teaching and counselling learners of differing ethnic origins. It is expected that participants will leave the session with the understanding necessary for accommodating cultural differences in the assessment process and an increased sensitivity to cultural differences, which will enhance the validity of assessment results.

Giving Feedback to the PLA Candidate:
Because assessing prior learning relies heavily on active communication within the learning and teaching relationship, this session introduces communication techniques and evaluates their appropriateness for use with the PLA candidate.

Sessions Developed by Central Region PLA project

Two additional sessions, documented within *Principles, Methods and Resources for Teaching and Facilitating the Portfolio Development Course — Resource Manual: Sample Portfolios,* and *Portfolio-Assisted Assessment of Prior Learning: Workshop Overview,* were developed within a PLA pilot project by the Central Region (see page 18).

Methods in Teaching the Portfolio Course:
This additional workshop is designed for the faculty member who will participate in the teaching of portfolio development courses. It includes discussion of the principles and reasons for the approaches introduced as well as for involving the learner within the teaching strategy.

Methods of Assessing Portfolios: This additional workshop explores the issues relevant to the assessment of portfolios for PLA. Participants get hands-on experience working with portfolios and use different strategies for focusing on what really counts in the portfolios being assessed.

Appendix 9: Related Acronyms and Initialisms

The acronyms and initialisms listed here are in some way related to the colleges of applied arts and technology and/or to the development and implementation of prior learning assessment.

ACAATO   Association of Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology (Ontario)

AEC   Aboriginal Education Council

BOG   Board of governors

CAAT(s)   College(s) of applied arts and technology (Ontario)

CAEL   Council on Adult and Experiential Learning

CCHRD   College Consultants/Committees on Human Resource Development

CEFFO   Conseil de l'éducation et de la formation franco-ontariennes (Franco-Ontarian Education and Training Council)

COG   Council of Governors (ACAATO)

COP   Council of Presidents (ACAATO)

COR   See OCOR

CRALO   College Registrars, Admissions, and Liaison Officers

CSAC   College Standards and Accreditation Council

ESL   English as a Second Language

FML   French as a Mother Language

FNTI   First Nations Technical Institute

FSL   French as a Second Language

GAS   General Arts and Science

HRDC   Human Resource Development, Canada

LTAB   Local Training and Adjustment Board

MET   Ministry of Education and Training (Ontario)

OCCSPA   Ontario Community College Student Parliamentary Association

OCOR   Ontario Council of Regents

OMDP   Ontario Management Development Program

OPSEU   Ontario Public Service Employees Union

OSAP   Ontario Student Assistance Plan

OSSD   Ontario Secondary School Diploma

OSSGD   Ontario Secondary School Graduation Diploma

OTAB   Ontario Training and Adjustment Board

PLA   Prior learning assessment

Appendix 10: Related Terms

The terms defined here are in some way related to the colleges of applied arts and technology and/or to the development and implementation of prior learning assessment.

Academic Upgrading – Educational programs to further develop academic or vocational competence and/or qualifications. Such programs include adult training and college preparatory courses.

Academic Year – A twelve-month period beginning September 1 and ending August 31. The Academic Year usually is divided into three terms: Fall (September to December), Winter (January to April), and Summer (May to August).

Adult Training – Any instruction, other than university instruction, that provides a person with skills for, or improves a person's skills in, an occupation. When applied to programs within the National Training Act, "adult" is defined as any person "no longer required by the law in the province in which he/she resides to attend school".

Advanced Standing Credit – Any credits which are awarded on enrolment in a college and which satisfy a college's course or program requirements for a credential. Advanced standing credits must be within 75 per cent of a program's total credits requirements (see Residency Requirement).

Agency-Assisted Student – A student whose fees are paid by some agency such as the Worker's Compensation Board, the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services, or the Canada Department of Indian and Northern Affairs. This term should not be confused with "sponsored student" (see below).

Apprenticeship Training – A structured program of on-the-job and related classroom training in more than 600 skilled construction, motive-power, industrial, and service trades. About 90 per cent of apprenticeship training in Ontario is delivered in the workplace; the remainder is done at colleges. OTAB manages the delivery of apprenticeship training.

Central Admissions Publication – An up-to-date compilation of the college's admission criteria and selection procedures on a program-by-program basis, which is available for public reference through the office of the registrar.

Certificate – The document awarded by the board of governors in recognition of successful completion of a program requiring less than four semesters of study.

Challenge Process – Methods of assessment other than portfolio, developed and evaluated by subject-expert faculty to measure an individual's learning achievements against course learning outcomes. It measures demonstrated learning through a variety of written and non-written evaluation methods, for the purpose of awarding credit without requiring enrolment in a course.

Choices – A HRDC-administered program/computer search of occupations and of education and training programs and schools, providing a link between specific occupations and available programs of study.

College Service Area (or Catchment Area) – The geographic service area within which the college has the primary responsibility for meeting the educational and training needs of the community, subject to available resources. All college facilities are located within the service area.

Competency Benchmarks, Training Profiles, Provincial Program Guidelines – Guidelines or standards of occupations or careers for which programs exist in the colleges – for example, architectural technologist, general machinist, registered nurse – and which can be used as the basis for the development of program curricula, or as tools to evaluate the effectiveness of existing programs.

Contact Hour – Time spent by students in contact with college resources, usually in the classroom during the delivery of a course.

Continuing Education Programs – Programs in which courses are not required to be completed within an established period.

Continuous Intake/Exit – A program without predetermined commencement and completion dates, allowing students to be accepted or graduated at any time according to actual student demand and staff resources.

Co-operative Program – A program which formally integrates the student's academic study with paid work experience in cooperating employer organizations by alternating periods of work experience with periods of institutional study, and in which the total co-operative work experience represents a minimum of 30 per cent of the time spent in academic study.

Counselling Services – A confidential service provided by college staff to students who wish to discuss academic, vocational, personal, financial, learning disability, or handicap problems or opportunities.

Course – A unit of instruction or learning which may be available to students either as part of a program of instruction or as a discrete educational offering.

Course (Credit) – A course whose successful completion provides credit or credits towards a college certificate or diploma or other academic accreditation.

Course (Non-Credit) – A course for which no credit is given.

Courses Eligible for Challenge – Those courses which have clear statements of learning outcomes, areas of content, criteria for success, and specified assessment methodologies, and which are available to PLA candidates within a reasonable period of time.

Credit – The acknowledgment of a student's successful completion of a course, or its equivalent, leading to a certificate or diploma or other academic accreditation.

Day Release – A system of in-school training referral whereby employers allow their employees to attend a college (usually one day per week) without loss of pay.

Diploma – The document awarded by the board of governors of the college in recognition of successful completion of a program requiring at least four semesters of study.

Direct Purchase – That purchase mechanism by which the federal government purchases training directly from public institutions (colleges).

English as a Second Language (ESL) – Modified English-language programs specifically designed for persons unable to communicate in English, emphasizing English fluency and some cultural/work orientation.

Equivalent Standing – Academic standing from other provinces and countries which is recognized as the equivalent of an OSSD or OSSGD for admission purposes.

French as a Second Language – Modified French-language programs specifically designed for persons unable to communicate in French, emphasizing French fluency and some cultural/work orientation.

Full-Time Program – A program in which all courses are scheduled to be completed within an established period.

Full-Time Student – In the non-operating context, a student who is so designated by the college. Designation may vary from one college to another. In the operating grant context, a student enrolled in a postsecondary program, provided the student is carrying a course load of at least 70 per cent of the nominal student contact hours or 66.6 per cent of the courses normally required by the program.

Indirect Purchase – A purchase mechanism by which the federal government contracts with a coordinating group for the purchase of training and/or training delivery. Depending on the nature of specific projects, colleges may act as managing coordinators, where they have overall project responsibility, or may subcontract with third-party managing coordinators for the provision of a portion of the training (normally in-school).

Mature Student – A student who is nineteen years of age on or before the date of commencement of a program and who lacks an OSSGD or OSSD.

Modular Training – Flexible, performance-based training delivered in incremental steps with accreditation provided on successful completion of each module. Such training can be delivered at the college or on the job.

Non-Semestered Program – A program which is not scheduled in accordance with the regular Fall and Winter semesters and in which instruction continues without the regularly scheduled summer break.

Ontario Management Development Program (OMDP) – College-delivered program to assist employees and owner/managers to improve their supervisory skills.

Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) – Granted to students who started a secondary school program on or after September 1, 1984, and who successfully complete a minimum of 30 credits (16 of which are compulsory). The OSSD replaces the Ontario Secondary School Graduation Diploma (OSSGD). The OSSGD still applies to students who entered secondary school prior to September 1, 1984.

Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) – A system of financial assistance for students, designed to supplement, but not replace, the financial resources of students and their immediate families. OSAP comprises Ontario Study Grant Plan; Canada Student Loans Plan; Ontario Special Bursary Plan; Ontario Work-Study Plan; and Part-Time Student Loans Plan.

Part-Time Education Programs – Programs in which courses are not required to be completed within an established period.

Part-Time Student – A student who, at any given time, is not taking a full schedule of courses; e.g., a student who is enrolled in a full-time program on a part-time basis (under normal circumstances, carrying a course load which is less than 70 per cent of the normal student contact hours or less than two-thirds of the courses normally required by the program) or who is enrolled in a part-time program.

Portfolio Assessment – The critical review by subject-expert faculty of a dossier produced by a PLA candidate to document prior acquisition of the knowledge and skills taught within a course, and to gain the credit for that course. This assessment is distinct from challenge assessments and does not require enrolment in any course.

Portfolio Development Course – A course designed to assist learners to analyse and document their learning, plan their vocational and/or academic career, and to request college course credits for their learning. Portfolio development courses are a PLA activity, funded by the Ministry of Education and Training.

Prior Learning Assessment – A process which uses a variety of tools to help learners reflect on, identify, articulate, and demonstrate past learning which has been acquired through study, work, and other life experiences, and which is not recognized through formal transfer-of-credit mechanisms. PLA allows the evaluation of past learning against established academic standards so that credit can be awarded by a credentialling body.

Program of Instruction – A group of related courses leading to a diploma, certificate, or other document awarded by a board of governors.

Residency Requirement – The minimum number of credits (or length of time) that must be taken through courses under the direct supervision of faculty of the credential-issuing college in order to obtain that credential.

Sponsored Student – A student on whose behalf an agency, usually governmental, pays the entire educational cost, not just the standard tuition fee. Compare "agency-assisted student", above.